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## ARTICLES

A HEGELIAN MOMENT OF *SITTlichkeit* : POISED FOR GENDER POLITICS  
KESHAB CHOUDHURI

ERNESTO GUEVARA : THINKER AND ACTIVIST  
BIKASH CHAKRABORTI

THE SUPREME COURT AND THE FEDERAL PROCESS IN INDIA  
BHARATI ROY

THE CPI AND THE 'IMPERIALIST WAR' (1939-41) : CALCUTTA—A REVIEW  
AMITABHA CHANDRA

QUESTION HOUR AND ZERO HOUR IN WEST BENGAL LEGISLATURE  
AMIYA K. CHAUDHURI

RELIGION AND POLITICS : TENSION OR INTEGRATION ?  
NINI CHANDA

THE JHARKHAND MOVEMENT IN ORISSA  
A. P. PADHI AND R. N. MISHRA

SIKKIM : FROM THEOCRACY TO DEMOCRACY  
APARNA BHATTACHARYA

ON THE STYLE OF MIDDLE-CLASS POLITICS IN ASSAM (1979-1993)  
SAMIR KUMAR DAS

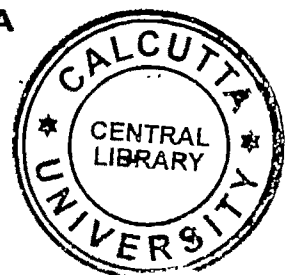
## BOOK REVIEWS

SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE : MAN, MISSION AND MEANS ( SUBHAS CHANDRA  
CHATTOPADHYAY )  
ASHOKE MUSTAFI

CONFLICT AND STATE : EXPLORATION IN THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE POST-  
COLONIAL STATE IN INDIA (PRASANTA RAY )  
RAKHAHARI CHATTERJI

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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA





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### CONTENTS

|  |                                 |         |
|--|---------------------------------|---------|
| A Hegelian Moment of <i>Stitlichkeit</i> :<br>Poised for Gender Politics                                     | Keshab Choudhuri                | 1       |
| Ernesto Guevara : Thinker and<br>Activist  | Bikash Chakraborti              | 20      |
| The Supreme Court and the Federal<br>Process in India  | Bharati Roy                     | 34      |
| The CPI and the 'Imperialist War'<br>(1939-41) : Calcutta—A Review   | Amitabha Chandra                | 47      |
| Question Hour and Zero Hour in<br>West Bengal Legislature  | Amiya K. Chaudhuri              | 63      |
| Religion and Politics : Tension or<br>Integration ?  | Nini Chanda                     | 85      |
| The Jharkhand Movement in Orissa   | A. P. Padhi and<br>R. N. Mishra | 90      |
| Sikkim : From Theocracy to<br>Democracy  | Aparna Bhattacharya             | 100     |
| On the Style of Middle-Class Politics<br>in Assam (1979-1983)  | Samir Kumar Das                 | 113     |
| <b>Book Reviews</b>  |                                 | 134—138 |
| Subhas Chandra Bose : Man, Mission<br>and Means ( Subhas Chandra<br>Chattopadhyay )                          | Ashoke Mustafi                  |         |
| Conflict and State : Exploration in the<br>Behaviour of the Post-Colonial<br>State in India ( Prasanta Ray ) | Rakhahari Chatterji             |         |

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Editor : Asok Mukhopadhyay

## **A Hegelian Moment of *Sittlichkeit* : Poised for Gender Politics ?**

Keshab Choudhuri\*

To comprehend Hegel's philosophy of spirit one has to refer to the three sections of his *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* dealing with subjective spirit, objective spirit and absolute spirit. The Philosophy of Spirit, the third section of the *Encyclopaedia*, deals with *Gelst* ( spirit ) as 'the self-knowing actual Idea, raised to the concept of the living Spirit which in necessary wise draws distinctions in itself, and returns to unity with itself out of its distinctions.'<sup>1</sup> Hegel goes on to say that all activities of spirit 'are no more than diverse ways of reducing the external to the inwardness which spirit itself is, and only through this reduction, this idealization or assimilation of the external, can it become and be Spirit.'<sup>2</sup> His *Philosophy of Right*, with much greater fulness than the *Encyclopaedia*, brings into focus the triadic structure of spirit, subdivided triadically into a number of stages.

Subjective spirit, we are told, is spirit which is as yet unconscious of all its essence, it is only spirit for the philosophers or the discerning observers and not for itself. Such a spirit is opposed to the natural world in which it finds nothing akin to itself. Being so opposed, it is also, to a great extent, in a state of bondage to what it opposes. It is essentially a nature-bound spirit.

The dialectic unfolds in objective spirit where spirit develops into a complete 'world' held in position by a compelling necessity. This necessity rests on the kingpin of freedom. In the realm of objective spirit human consciousness comes into its own. Abstract right (or law), morality and social ethics are the objective, institutional expressions of such a spirit.

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The third stage is reached when the development of spirit terminates in absolute spirit where spirit is conscious of itself, as 'the informing principle of the world' as well as being the 'truth' of everything that reaches it.<sup>3</sup> The realm of absolute spirit is superior to that of objective spirit, it is manifested in art, religion and philosophy.

Hegel's doctrine of objective spirit receives a comprehensive treatment in his *Philosophy of Right*. It is articulated triadically into a discussion comprising three stages : the stage of abstract or formal right, the stage of subjective morality and finally the stage of ethical life which includes his theories of the state and history. 'Ethical life is the unity of the will in its concept with the will of the individual.'<sup>4</sup> Freedom is the outcome of the unity of content and form achieved in human consciousness. But freedom in any society is never attained straightway ; it has got to be mediated. Men become free only by attaining self-consciousness through their interaction with the objective world surrounding them. This process of attainment is education (*Bildung*) which leads one to consciousness of freedom.<sup>5</sup> The stages of this education are coterminous with the stages of abstract right, subjective morality and ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). The unity of the will in its concept with the will of the individual is achieved only in the end in ethical life, but will first appears as immediate in absolute or formal right and thereafter gets reflected in subjective morality.

Ethical life, Hegel tells us, manifests itself in three dialectically interrelated phases :

- a. The family which embodies ethical life 'in its natural and immediate phase' ;
- b. The civil society that incorporates ethical life 'in its division and appearance' ;
- c. The state which guarantees universal and objective freedom 'even in the free self-subsistence of the particular will.'<sup>6</sup>

The family, the civil society and the state are but three moments of ethical life. It is the third moment that has attracted enormous and widespread attention from philosophers, political scientists and commentators and inspired them to write profusely and talk almost *ad infinitum*. It remains, of course, true that the philosophy of the

state is Hegel's most outstanding contribution to the realm of social philosophy.<sup>7</sup> But, is it not also equally true that the moment of ethical life represented by the state altogether eludes conceptualization unless a thorough acquaintance is made with the nature and significance of the two other moments—the family and the civil society? The primary concern of this write-up is to analyse the Hegelian perception of the familial moment of ethical life and to enquire whether such a perception introduces gender politics designed against the emancipation of women.

# I

The three moments of ethical life can be viewed as three distinct and alternative modes of inter-human relationship. One mode obviously is located at a level which may be designated as 'particular altruism': at this level one relates oneself to other human beings, not with the idea of promoting one's own interests at the expense of others. Rather, one is ready to make sacrifices for the sake of others. Family life is the area where altruism of this kind is manifest: children, old, infirm and such others are here taken care of because they are related to one another through family ties. These relations including that of the husband and wife are, of course, altruistic in a particularistic sense. Familial altruism is limited and particular inasmuch as it 'does not apply to all and sundry', only a limited number of individuals in a fixed sphere is within its purview.<sup>8</sup>

The second mode of inter-human relationship is represented by the civil society which is but a sphere of universal egoism. In such a society universal self-seeking works out 'a system of intricate interdependence and a profound interweaving and interlocking of the welfare and rights of all.'<sup>9</sup> The society conceived by Hegel owes a lot to the economic writings of the British classical economists and the utilitarians, particularly those of James Steuart, Adam Smith and Ricardo. Hegel finds in the 'celebrated invisible hand thesis' of Smith an illustration of the 'cunning of reason'; to him it appears that rationality or reason should work underground to connect the selfish pursuit of individual good with the realization of the collective good of all rather than working out its designs in the light of the day.<sup>10</sup>

The ancient polis in the Graeco-Roman days, according to Hegel, successfully harmonised the activities of the citizens with the whole

ethical life of the state. Such a harmonization is neither possible nor desirable in the modern state system. There can be now no going back to the immediate unity of the individual with the political community. History has marched ahead. The right of the individual to pursue his own interests and to be himself as such must be honoured, no matter whether this very moment appears immediately as a negation of the unity of the whole. This sphere of particularity is the realm of civil society (as distinguished from the state). To Hegel it appears that the principle of the modern state has prodigious strength and depth because it allows 'the principle of subjectivity to progress to its culmination in the extreme of self-subsistent personal particularity, and yet at the same time brings it back to the substantial unity.'<sup>11</sup> In dialectical terms the sphere of civil society represents the moment of 'difference', whereas the state society achieves its 'identity' in the exercise of political sovereignty.<sup>12</sup>

The structure of civil society is primarily economic and here individuals participate not as members of family nor as members of some ethical community like the state or the church. Here individuals are related to one another just as persons in the Hegelian sense—as bearers of rights. Here 'a man counts as a man in virtue of his humanity alone, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, German, Italian, etc.'<sup>13</sup>

Civil society may be regarded as an atomistic need-state. Men have needs which they satisfy through work and effort. Unlike animals, men are not limited to a single set of species-needs which have a constancy for all throughout time. They exhibit their transcendence and universality in multiplying needs and the means of satisfying them. In doing so they generate even more intense social cooperation. More division of labour, more production and more complex relations of exchange are the inevitable results. Through these processes men are thus prepared for the universal.

In the multiplication of needs and the craze for satisfying them Rousseau found the basis of decadence and evil in man. To Hegel it appeared that the Rousseauian view might have been right in the ancient world when society was ill-equipped to cope with the growth of self-consciousness and the search for one's own good. The modern

state, however, is capable of synthesizing individual subjectivity and the universal. Hegel displays no Rousseauesque disapproval of the drive towards an indefinite multiplication of needs, but it is also true that he speaks scornfully of the progress towards infinity involved in the English pursuit of 'comfort'.<sup>14</sup>

The Hegelian civil society is not only an economic need-state, it has also its basis on judicial and political considerations. The unity that is found among the members of civil society for promoting their common interest automatically creates the need for the administration of justice and a certain amount of regulation of the economy. The sketch of the Hegelian civil society, therefore, has three divisions: the system of wants, the administration of justice and the institutions of police and corporation. Despite an implicit recognition for a little regulatory control needed for the working of the civil society, it is quite evident that an unplanned economy fits in well with the purpose of Hegel's civil society; he believes that the particular and universal 'only exist through each other, and automatically 'swing over into one another.'<sup>15</sup> An apparent economic anarchy, therefore, has a part to play in Hegel's organic society and it is not surprising that he allows the freedom to make money to the unprincipled money-makers.

The three divisions of the civil society do not in any way constitute 'the political community as the substance'. The goal of all the judicial and politico-economic regulations of civil society is no other than the individual good of the members. Civil society can never experience the moment of *sittlichkeit* represented by the state because in it the members are always treated as subjects of needs.

The third moment of ethical life finds its abode in the mode of inter-human relationship represented in the state. To Hegel the state is universal altruism, i.e., a mode of relating oneself to a universe of human beings not out of egoistic interests but because of a conscious urge and a will to live meaningfully with the other members in a community characterized by solidarity.

To Hegel it appears that the state should never be conceived, as in traditional liberal theories, as an arrangement for safeguarding the interests of its members. Such theories fail to distinguish between the state and civil society. They cannot explain why the demands of



the state in terms of taxation and military service should be binding on its members. In Hegel's political philosophy the state appears as the full realization of the idea of *sittlichkeit*, it is a community in which the good is realized through consciousness of solidarity, readiness to put up sacrifices and promotion of rationality in communal life. The state is defined by Hegel as 'the actuality of the ethical idea—the ethical spirit, as the substantial will, revealed, lucid to itself, which thinks and knows itself, and which carries out what it knows in so far as it knows it.'<sup>10</sup> The state is coterminous with the community where the fullness of rationality is manifest in public life. So considered, the state represents only the idea of the state. Actual states generally conform to it very inadequately. But a fully developed state 'reconciles the fully developed individual subjectivity and the universal.'<sup>11</sup> Freedom comes to its highest right in it. It is concrete freedom.

'Concrete freedom consists in this, that personal individuality and its particular interests not only achieve their complete development and gain explicit recognition for their right (as they do in the sphere of the family and civil society) but, for one thing, they know and will the universal; they even recognize it as their own substantive mind; they take it as their end and aim, and are active in its pursuit.'<sup>12</sup>

## II

The moment that experiences the first glimpse of public or common life is represented by the family. The family provides an immediate inward unity based on feeling, not mediated by reason. It has 'as the immediate substantiality of the spirit, its self-sensitive unity, love as its determination, so that its prevailing mood is to have the self-consciousness of one's individuality in this unity as what is essential in and for itself, so as not to be in it as a person on one's own account, but as a member.'<sup>13</sup> Unlike Schlegel who held the opinion that if love existed between persons no ceremony or objectification was needed to solemnise it, Hegel considered institutionalization to be the objective side of love. He maintained that the institution of marriage combines the subjective and objective aspects: the subjective side concerns

itself with love as the sublimation of the biological drive into a will to identify with the other, whereas the objective side expresses itself in the institution of marriage.<sup>20</sup>

The family's own objectification, however, is to be found in children. Hegel argues that 'the parents love the children as their love, as the embodiment of their substance' and the unity achieved through marriage manifests itself externally, objectively and explicitly as a unit in the children.<sup>21</sup>

Hegel states categorically that the family is not a contractual contrivance. Contractual relations are but an instrument of the civil society. To view the family or the state in contractual terms is to degrade the telos of these organizations. There is an inherent tendency of the civil society to distort, through an extension of its relational modes, some of the other-oriented, altruistic and reciprocal inter-human relations existing within the family and the state. Hegel was well aware of the tendency of the civil society concepts increasingly claiming to have a sway over the other spheres of life not belonging to it and he was thoroughly opposed to such encroachments on areas belonging to the family and the state.

Marriage is not subsumed under the concept of contract. Such a subsumption, 'though shameful is the word for it', is propounded, according to Hegel, in Kant's *Philosophy of Law*. Though he opposes the Kantian idea of marriage grounded on contract, he is of the opinion that marriage begins in contract, a very special type of contract that has as its aim the transcendence of the standpoint of contract, 'the standpoint from which persons are regarded in their individuality and self-subsisting units.'<sup>22</sup> Rights flow from contractual relations, whereas duties, not rights, are prescribed by marriage. Rights arising out of wedlock surface only at the time of its dissolution. When either of the parties claims the right to divorce the marital relations are already in the process of breaking up. Hegel takes up the position that family property is not vested in the individual but in the family unit ; inheritance by family members finds its rationale from this familial property-holding. Inheritance, alimony, maintenance and such other rights only crop up at the time of dissolution of marriage by death or divorce.<sup>23</sup>

Hegel considers love to be the nexus that binds the members of the family into oneness. He does not confine the concept of love to the romantics' ambit of discussion on the subject, he elevates it to a higher dialectical realization of the contradiction in love and makes it the basis of his idealist metaphysics that postulates the universe or the Absolute as 'identity in difference.'<sup>24</sup>

In *Realphilosophie* Hegel views marriage as the unity of personality and impersonality, of the natural and the spiritual. 'The first moment of love is that I do not wish to be a self-sufficient and independent person and that, if I were, then I would feel defective and incomplete. The second moment is that I find myself in another person, that I count for something in the other, while the other in turn comes to count for something in me.'<sup>25</sup> In a family, Hegel says, 'one's frame of mind is to have self-consciousness of one's individuality within this unity as the absolute essence of oneself, with the result that one is in it not as an independent person but as a member.' In the family bond one transcends one's egoism and renounces 'natural and individual personality'. Looked at from this point of view, the union achieved by the family is a self-restriction, but in reality it is their liberation. Thus, there remains always an inner contradiction because love itself is 'the most tremendous contradiction'.<sup>26</sup>

Hegel's working out of the dynamic of love has important bearings on his political theory. Firstly, he sees the operation of love as essentially egalitarian: 'True union, or love proper, exists only between living beings who are alike in power and thus in one another's eyes living beings, from every point of view, in no respect is either dead for the other. This genuine love excludes all oppositions.'<sup>27</sup>

Love opposes authoritarianism and any kind of master-servant relation. 'It detracts nothing from love's greatness, it does not degrade it.' It is rather love's triumph over these that it lords it over nothing, is without any hostile power over another'. Love 'pronounces no imperative'.

Love is essentially linked with freedom. Hegel in his youth said that 'love neither restricts nor is restricted, it is not finite at all. The reference to 'not finite at all' has far-reaching implications which have been summarized by W. V. Diniela in the following way :

...because love is unselfish, it does not take advantage of others; insofar as this attitude does not exert personal or social domination, it does not cause self-defensive attitude in others. More abstractly, in a society of lovers, there is no need for prospective barriers; instead of possible divisiveness, the resulting psycho-social situation is that of continuity, i.e., free interaction.<sup>28</sup>

Hegel considers the operation of love as essentially rational. Working on the Kantian criterion of what makes actions moral, Hegel argues that since love is not selfish and does not seek privileges and self-exemptions, it is universalizable (to use an expression from Kant) and, therefore, rational when judged by the standard of practical reason.<sup>29</sup>

Young Hegel's early ethic of love views reason and its manifestations not as abstract and obscure mental faculties, but as real and effective socio-psychological factors. It seems logical to infer that when the later Hegel speaks of 'the role of reason in history' he refers to a certain disposition which, in varying measures and intensities, is active in personal relationships, social phenomena and political structures.<sup>30</sup>

The institution of the family based on the foundation of love is only a transitory stage. Its natural unity is of necessity integrated into a plurality of families, each of which conducts itself, as in principle a self-subsistent concrete person. Individuals enter the domain of civil society.

### III

The initial reaction of contemporary feminism to Hegel's social and political writings has been to align him with other major figures in western political thought, including Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Rousseau and Mill in a biological, reductionist tradition.<sup>31</sup> Hegel is considered to be no different from the other western philosophers whose political theorizations are based on masculinist assumptions. His *Philosophy of Right* is brought under sustained feminist onslaughts; it is said to abound in passages that show his commitment to a 'functionalist' or 'reductionist' viewpoint. Moller Okin in her *Women in Western Political Thought* argues that Hegel 'disposed of the female half of the human race', by allowing only the male half to

have a political representative role.<sup>32</sup> Hegel is quoted to have said that the family is to be represented by the male head only and not by any female member. Women find a place in the family because it is a necessary and natural institution. The role performance expected of women in the family as conceived by Hegel is such that they are cut off from public life and deprived of carving out for themselves an opportunity to acquire a distinct political identity.

It is true that Hegel speaks of marriage as resulting from 'the free surrender by both sexes of their personality'. But is not such a view over-optimistic? In a male-dominated society the surrender of the man's personality is 'more symbolic than real'.<sup>33</sup> Conversely, the woman's surrender is more often than not total, real and compulsively enforced. The feminist charge against Hegel is that his functionalist views on family and marriage lend an ideological support to the continuing oppression of women.

Elshtain draws a parallel between the inhabitants of Orwell's *Animal Farm* and those of Hegel's political community and maintains that, despite the ethical significance attached to the inhabitants, both Orwell and Hegel make some of the inhabitants 'more significant than others'.<sup>34</sup> In the Hegelian community women are less significant than men because they are excluded from the public sphere and confined to the level of the household. Women are 'defined by the family: the family is a woman's beginning and her end'. On the other hand, the family is, for the man, a kind of ethical relationship which serves 'as the basis of all others, including citizenship'.<sup>35</sup>

There is, of course, no public-private split in the Hegelian political formulations, but the two spheres may be said to have been somewhat differentiated and ordered as higher and lower. The relationship between the spheres is reciprocal, if also asymmetrical. Such a relationship, Hegel thought, required mediations or interlinks to connect the two spheres and only men, and not women, were capable of providing the requisite role-performance in their stations in life as brothers, husbands, fathers and property-owners.<sup>36</sup>

Hegel is often made the target of contemporary feminist attacks mostly because of his views in the *Philosophy of Right* concerning the fundamental differences between men and women and the role assign-

ments recommended by him for the sexes in the family, the civil society and the state. Okin, Lloyd,<sup>37</sup> Elshtain and others consider him a prisoner of patriarchal attitude and practices and 'committed to biological reductionism characteristic of western political thought insofar as he confines women to the private sphere on the basis of assumed natural characteristics'.<sup>38</sup> The following list of Hegel's views on the differences between man and woman, although by no means exhaustive, may obviously seem to be a conclusive evidence of Hegel's anti-women attitudinal frame of mind :

1. Male and female nature may be distinguished in terms of the analogue of form and matter whereby the male provides the human form during mating and the female serves as a vessel within which the male-created homunculus incubates'.<sup>39</sup>

2. Men are 'powerful and active', endowed with 'the self-consciousness of conceptual thought', whereas women are 'passive and subjective, their knowledge and volition being concretized into individuality and feeling'.<sup>40</sup>

3. The difference between men and women is like that between animals and plants. Men correspond to animals. Women resemble plants because their development is more placid and the principle that underlies it is the rather vague unity of feeling'.<sup>41</sup>

4. When women hold the helm of government, the state is at once in jeopardy, because women regulate their actions not by the demands of universality but by arbitrary inclinations and opinions. Women are educated—who knows how?—as it were by breathing in ideas, by living rather than by acquiring knowledge. The status of manhood, on the other hand, is attained only by the stress of thought and much technical exertion'.<sup>42</sup>

5. Women are not made for activities 'which demand a universal faculty such as the more advanced sciences, philosophy and certain forms of artistic ideas'. However, they do have 'happy ideas, taste and elegance'.<sup>43</sup>

6. Although men and women engage in family life at the level of feeling, for the former life in the family forms only a part of their existence, whereas for the latter it is but the limits of their self-realization. A woman who 'surrenders her body' before or outside

marriage loses her honour while for a man this is not necessarily the case.<sup>44</sup>

7. 'A man has his actual substantive life in the state, in learning and so forth, as well as in labour and struggle with the external world and with himself so that it is only out of his diremption that he fights his way to self-subsistent unity with himself'. In contrast a woman has her substantive destiny in the family'.<sup>45</sup>

Such views of Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right* have led a number of social scientists upholding the feminist cause to conclude that he was not at all different from the other intellectuals of his age who believed that a woman's biology was her destiny. It is quite obvious that several assumptions of Hegel were tainted by maleness, but this does not in any way make it difficult to reconstruct a different kind of Hegel who hardly inflicts any grievous injury to the feminist cause. His analyses of 'tragedy' and the system of slavery in the *Phenomenology of Mind*, his historical studies in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* and his views on the public-private sphere relationships in *Philosophy of Right* are evidence enough to disprove any such hypothesis that he was a gender politician upholding the banner of male superiority.

#### IV

Hegel's treatment of family life is in many ways 'interesting and touching': he emphasizes not only the close relation of the women folk of the family to the elemental divine law, he also places 'a peculiar stress on the unique character of the brother-sister relationship'. A sister's duty to her brother is considered by him to be of the highest and the loss of the brother to her irreparable. Hegel finds in *Antigone* a very compelling tragedy in view of the fact that the relationship between brother and sister explored therein is based on the purest kind of love without any trace of sexual desire. Luka's remark in this context seems appropriate: Hegel views love as 'the highest point of existence; it alone can overcome all that is dead and positive in the world'.<sup>46</sup> Hegel understands the justification for Creon's resolve to uphold the authority of the state, but he appears to be in deep sympathy with the cause Antigone stands for. The ethical superiority of her cause is beyond doubt. But what is most

remarkable in Sophocles' tragedy is that her cause is held in high tension between her claims as an individual and her citizen obligations. This deepens the sense of tragedy—on the one hand, as an individual Antigone is guided by her love for disobeying Creon to bury her brother; on the other, she is quite aware of the fact that she is committing the crime of violating the law and authority of the state.

In Hegel's analysis Antigone is not guided by subjective emotion; her rational assessment of the consequences of her actions at once moves her beyond contingency towards the universal. She is eminently suited to be the heroine of a tragedy because she is a self-conscious human being who knows her own rights and purposes and goes beyond them to uphold an ethical principle. Her ethical consciousness takes cognizance of the guilt involved in choosing a course of action not prescribed by the law of the state. To Hegel it appears that her ethical consciousness gets purer and her guilt washed off its blemish. 'Love, as represented by Antigone, is not devalued to subjectivity, but rather signifies its opposite for Hegel: love constitutes redemption, redemption from the subjectivity of individualism of the self and of the society'.<sup>47</sup>

Hegel's view of the tragic heroine is not in any way damaging to the cause of feminism. Perhaps his view is more profound and penetrating than most of the analyses of *Antigone* made by contemporary feminists. Such analyses lack adequate objectivity because of the partisan zeal to interpret almost everything in the light of the emancipation of women. Elshtain, for example, maintains that the tragic figure of Antigone embodies the conflict of public and private understood as masculine (instrumentalist) and feminine (caring) values of the community. To her it seems that Antigone takes up the position of women and articulates a maternal discourse, rooted in the values and practices of the family, to contest the arrogance and violence of the state, represented by Creon'.<sup>48</sup>

Irigaray opines that Antigone may not have been moved by the patriarchal 'maternal ideal', but definitely by the 'woman-mother' (*femme-mère*) whose ancient murder she refuses to forget.<sup>49</sup> Creon's vision of the patrilineal and patriarchal state is bound to create a tense conflictual situation as it is diametrically opposed to the maternal ideal. Antigone's discourse clearly turned to be criminal and



almost suicidal in view of the fact that she was challenging the law of the political city that recognized only the masculine voice and, what Irigaray chooses to designate as the logic of the 'self-same'.<sup>50</sup> Obviously, there could be no common ground for Creon and Antigone because the former recognized only the law of the father and the latter appealed to that of the mother.

Elshtain finds Antigone voicing a feminine cause, Josette Feral sees her articulating 'the unspoken in speech, her maternal debt, by living and dying a virgin'.<sup>51</sup> In Elshtain's opinion Antigone seems to be the champion of the cause of women in general; in Feral's view Antigone denies 'the woman in the name of the mother which she will never be'.<sup>52</sup> Elshtain considers her a guardian of the prerogatives of the 'oikos', preserver of family duty and honour, and defender of children. In performing her guardianship role Antigone moves far away from the social world in which human life is nurtured.<sup>53</sup> Her role performance leads her to another world—that of the citizens. The dichotomy involved in such a type of dual role performance is scarcely highlighted in Elshtain's 'maternal heroine'.

For Dietz, however, she is first and foremost a citizen. She 'transcends' the private-public split because she embodies the personal made political'. Through her speech and actions she succeeds in transforming a matter of private concern into a public issue. She appears to stand for an alternative political ethos in place of the state representing centralized power. She projects a collective civil life based on customs and traditions. This projection of Antigone by Dietz clearly neglects 'the doubled figure of tomb-womb' to which Antigone is condemned and to which she condemns herself.<sup>54</sup>

Feminist perception of Antigone may be said to be a derivative from a variety of interpretations. To many scholars upholding the cause of women, she is an outstanding spokesperson for the rights of the women folk, to many others she is a model 'maternal heroine'. She is credited to have defied all 'the inventions of men', patriarchal family and state, 'by / in her relationship to Hades'. She is 'the daughter of Jocasta'.<sup>55</sup>

Whatever feminist interpretation of *Antigone* one chooses to accept or reject one cannot but be amazed by the exceptional originality of the Hegelian appreciation of the tragedy. Following Hegel, Luka's

rightly asserts that a tragedy may be analysed in terms of a collision of spirit with itself:

'What is striking about Hegel's view of the *Antigone* is the way in which the two poles of the contradiction are maintained in a tense unity; on the one hand, there is the recognition that tribal society stands higher morally and humanly than the class societies that succeed it.... On the other hand, there is the equally powerful conviction that this collapse (of tribal society) was inevitable and that it signified a definite historical advance.'<sup>56</sup>

Antigone's speeches and actions in defying the patriarchal authority of the state are determined by an authentic relation of love rather than sexual or economic motives or by blind obedience to authority.'<sup>57</sup> Nowhere does Hegel state that the 'feminine' quality of love is biologically determined; 'the ethical bonds of love' in *Antigone*, so much emphasized by Hegel, does not lend support to a reductionist view of women.

In Hegel's historical studies women are treated in the backdrop of cultures; the interrelationships between cultures and status of women form the nucleus of the studies. Nowhere in these studies can one find a reductionist theorization. What Hegel seems to suggest is that the role of women through the ages has been determined by cultural mediations.

Hegel's historicization of gender roles is not the result of genuine scientific research, methodologically speaking. It is quite likely that he relied much more on travellers' accounts than on more valid evidence. But it is beyond doubt that his treatment of women does not suffer from any *a priori* anti-woman bias.

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* Hegel refers to the full participation of women in public life by the women of Congo of primitive time<sup>58</sup>. In Dahomey a tribe is said to have existed that distributed children among the villages at birth and allowed the king to sell them when they attained marriageable age. Hegel discusses the freedom enjoyed by women in ancient Greece during the Bacchanalian festivities to give a free rein to their imagination and 'phantasies'. He contrasts the freedom of ancient Greek

women with the repression of women in the medieval period that allowed the 'ghastliness of witchcraft'. Attitudes towards sexuality, according to Hegel, are also culture-determined. To substantiate this he contrasts Jewish culture with oriental cultures.<sup>59</sup>

Historicization of gender roles in the Hegelian fashion cannot be reconciled with any reductionist interpretation of his view concerning the role of women in the family sphere or elsewhere. There is even an anti-reductionist strand, Susan M. Easton tells us, in his writing dealing with slavery.

In the Hegelian dynamic model of master-slave relation the master represents only a transient stage in the history of spirit while the servant, through a change in his consciousness, becomes the torch-bearer of progressive human development. The master is a prisoner of his own egotism; he is not subject to labour or fear. To him the slave is no other than the embodiment of his own immediate will. He gets from him the formal recognition of an unfree consciousness. The servant is the forerunner of change because he meets the two preconditions of freedom—fear and service. Fear is the harbinger of discipline and the first indication of 'the beginning of wisdom'.<sup>60</sup> In his service rendered to the master the slave loses his 'individual self-will' and overcomes the immediacy of appetite. Through 'fear of the lord' and divestment of self through service the slave begins to acquire knowledge and march forward to share in universal consciousness.

The Hegelian analytic model for analysing slavery may be profitably used for comprehending the problem of women's oppression in the contemporary world. Women because of their subordination are compelled to go beyond the immediacy of desire and move into the realm of rational reflection. They cannot but confront their own subordination and exploitation through consciousness and struggle. Men, on the other hand, stand in a relation to women governed by a dependency syndrome; being tied to the sensual world, they have to use the gratification of physical needs and the control of reproduction as a means of oppression.<sup>61</sup> Women's liberation, therefore, has to start with a change in their own consciousness and a course of struggle dictated by such a consciousness.

Orthodox feminists seek to identify Hegel's work with the public-private distinction of mainstream political thought; they overlook the tremendous dynamic potential in Hegelian philosophy that can be used to the advantage of the movement for women's liberation. True, Hegel was no revolutionary fighting for the woman's cause. Some of his opinions and views on women are overtly conservative. His attitudinal frame of mind in respect of women and their cause was shaped by the events of his life and time. His philosophy, like all others, is an honest autobiography. In this autobiography there is nothing that suggests he was a gender politician. Despite his conservatism Hegel stands out as a good bourgeois; his 'ethic' of love', 'master-servant dialectic', 'universal consciousness' etc may prove to be powerful weapons in the armoury of contemporary feminist intellectuals.

The three moments of Hegelian *sittlichkeit* are free from gender politics. His occasional conservative views on women must not be construed as an invitation to gender politics tilted against women. His philosophy has much to offer to contemporary feminists for continuing the struggle to achieve women's emancipation. One has to have the baby firmly in the hands and throw away the bath-water.

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
3. J. N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination*, p. 290.
4. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, addition to § 33 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952), trans. T. M. Knox.
5. *Ibid.*, addition to § 197. An excellent discussion is available in A. Kelly, *Idealism, Politics and History* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 341-348.
6. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, § 33 & § 157.
7. S. Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 133.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
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10. The implication of this can be better understood if one refers to Hegel's Preface to *Philosophy of Right*. He closes his Preface with 'one of the most poetic' sentence ever written by a philosopher: 'The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk'. Hegel

believes that philosophers can only comprehend that which is. They can understand the rationality of the civil society only after the market forces have performed their task.

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47. J. B. Elshtain, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
48. Linda M. G. Zerilli, "Women and the 'Conversation' of Political Theory", in *Political Theory* ( an International Journal of Political Philosophy, 19(2) May, 1991 ), p. 255.
49. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, translated Gillian G. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 217. The ancient murder is 'represented by the myth of the murder of Clytemnestra by her son in revenge for the murder of Agamemnon'.
50. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, pp. 217-218.
51. Linda M. G. Zerilli, *op. cit.*, p. 256.
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53. Ibid., p. 257.
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57. Susan M. Easton, *Hegel and Feminism*, p. 38.
58. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* ( Cambridge University Press, 1975 ), translated by H. B. Nisbet, appendix on Africa, pp. 173-190.
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61. This point is illustrated by The Draughtsman's Contract. See, Susan M. Easton, *Hegel and Feminism*, pp. 30-55.

## **Ernesto Guevara : Thinker And Activist**

**Bikash Chakraborti\***

The object of the present contribution is to present in a comprehensive way the views of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara who stormed the whole of Latin America and abroad during the sixties. It is commonly accepted that a revolutionary is best known by the revolutionary process that he has tried his level best to usher in throughout his life. Hence there is a necessity to refer to the revolutionary process in Latin America before and after the Cuban Revolution of January 1959.

Before the Cuban Revolution, Latin America witnessed a number of revolutionary outbreaks, for example, the Mexican Revolution led by Zapata in 1910, the Bolivian Revolution under the leadership of Victor Paz Estenssoro in 1952, the Guatemalan Revolution led by Arbenz in 1954 which was interrupted by the CIA-sponsored native forces, an 'incomplete revolution' in Venezuela led by Romulo Betancourt in February, 1959, and political upheavals in Argentina.<sup>1</sup> The highest common factor in all these incidents was that they were not certainly committed to any fundamental alteration of the socio-economic structure of the country concerned and were, quite logically, far from being Marxist in nature. Contrarily, they were, to use Marxian terminology, bourgeois-democratic revolutions, bent upon introducing some socio-economic reforms that would bring a sigh of relief in public life within the existing social framework. Considered in the light of these previous incidents, the Cuban Revolution may be said to have marked a distinct and fundamental departure from the bourgeois concept of revolution. In this connexion, two significant aspects of the Cuban Revolution may be mentioned. In the first place, it was rooted in the Cuban national tradition. Fidel Castro, in his celebrated trial speech *History Will Absolve Me*, unequivocally said that 'Marti' was the inspirer of the 26th of July.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, Marti's ideas of nationalism and humanism as elaborated by

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Castro had a wider acceptance to the Cuban masses. It should also be pointed out that Castro's ideas did not simply end in humanism only but showed a fair possibility of transition to an upward and onward development. Herbert L. Mathews rightly pointed out that Castro's humanism was shaped and re-shaped by conditions prevailing in Cuba and his conceptions, although limited, of Marxism.<sup>3</sup> In the second place, the leaders of the Cuban Revolution did not declare it to be a Marxist revolution during the course of the revolutionary war or immediately after they won the revolution. The declaration of the Marxist character of the revolution came much later for a variety of reasons, the discussion of which is outside the scope of the present paper. It is a matter of fact that the Cuban Revolution turned to Marxism in the process of its accomplishment. Ernesto Che Guevara, one of the principal architects of the revolution, duly emphasized the point: 'We, practical revolutionaries, when initiating our struggle, simply fulfilled laws foreseen by Marx the scientist...the laws of Marxism are present in the events of the Cuban Revolution, independently of what the leaders profess or know fully of those laws from a theoretical viewpoint.'<sup>4</sup> It is also important to bear in mind that the Cuban Revolution was not led by the official Communists in Cuba, that is, *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP). On the contrary, Fidel Castro and his associates, that is, the July 26 Movement named after the date of the attack on the Moncada Fortress in 1953, started the revolutionary process in defiance of the policy of collaboration with the Batista government pursued by the PSP since its birth.<sup>5</sup> The revolutionary front was composed of the July 26 Movement, the Revolutionary Directorate and the PSP which joined at a much later date and repudiated earlier the actions of the July 26 Movement in strongest terms as 'putschist methods'.

The Cuban Revolution provided Ernesto Guevara with the opportunity to materialise his long yearning for a revolution. There was a long course of development of his revolutionary career. Guevara's familial environment induced in him a non-conformist attitude against Peronism in Argentina. His extensive tour with his friend Alberto Granados in the countries of Latin America enriched his love and sympathy for mankind, diseased socially and physically. Guevara's practical experiences in the unsuccessful revolution in Bolivia in 1952 and in Guatemala in 1954 made him crystal-clear

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about the hollowness of the bourgeois democratic system. His acquaintances with the Cuban revolutionaries through his wife, Hilda Gadea, in Mexico enabled him to come across a revolutionary group getting trained for guerrilla warfare under Colonel Bayo. After a detailed discussion with Fidel on the prospect of the Cuban Revolution, Guevara became a member of the future revolution.

Guevara's role in the Cuban Revolution was somewhat unique. Initially he joined the July 26 Movement as a doctor and he made his sincerest efforts to render medical services to the wounded within the constraints of time and place. When revolutionary activities, and along with it agrarian reforms, spread, medical facilities were also extended to adjacent areas. Guevara was convinced about the fact that welfare activities, like medical care, were no remedy for the real disease, that is, social exploitation. The revolutionary process taught him the scientific truth: 'I became aware, then, of a fundamental fact: to be a revolutionary doctor or to be a revolutionary at all, there must be a revolution. The isolated effort of one man, regardless of its purity of ideals, is worthless.'<sup>6</sup> He was more eager to participate in the revolution as a combatant in the war front although he conceived the role of guerrilla fighter in its totality. He thought himself happiest on the day he was given an automatic rifle and four men to assist him: 'In this way, I made my debut as a fighting guerrilla; for until then I had been the troop's doctor, knowing only occasional combat. I had entered a new stage.'<sup>7</sup> Immediately after his new assignment Guevara proved his worth in the battle of El Uvero. With his enterprising and industrious ability Guevara made his best efforts to build up production units for cartridge boxes and belts, knapsacks, shoes, forging and armoury etc. Thus he established himself as a guerrilla fighter of the highest order who could view life with an all embracing approach. Apart from his capability to establish the infrastructure of the revolutionary organization, Guevara contributed largely to provide the revolution with a philosophical foundation. Michael Lowy pointed out that even before the revolution Guevara was already a Marxist, that he was the first to grasp fully the historico-social significance of the Cuban Revolution...<sup>8</sup> Fidel Castro, in his interview with Lee Lockwood, also acknowledged: 'I believe that at the time I met Che Guevara he had a

greater revolutionary development, ideologically speaking, that I had. From the theoretical point of view he was more formed, he was a more advanced revolutionary than I was.<sup>9</sup> Thus, being more equipped than others, Guevara was in a better position to assess and deal with contradictions developing in the revolutionary process. In his speech to the first Congress of Latin American Youth on July 28, 1960, he pointed out for the first time the character of the Cuban Revolution : 'This revolution, if it happens to be Marxist...and listen carefully, I say Marxist...is thus because it discovered by its own means the path that Marx pointed out.'<sup>10</sup> In this connexion, Guevara highlighted a striking reality of the Cuban Revolution and its uniqueness as well that all 'principal actors' of the revolution were not adept in the theory of Marxism but their longing for a real change of the oppressive rule, their vast experience in the realities of the Cuban society and the revolutionary path undertaken made in the course of time a kind of identification between their cause and the Marxist ideology.

It, therefore, stands out that the Cuban Revolution had its roots in the Cuban soil or, to speak in broader terms, in Latin America. Neither the Cuban Communists took the lead in organising the movement although they joined the movement later under pressure of circumstances, nor the international Communist leadership provided the July 26 Movement necessary instructions. The revolutionary wave generated by the Cuban Revolution spilled all over the continent and revolutionary activities in a number of Latin American countries began to consolidate to an increasing proportion. It was very commonly alleged that Cuba had been trying to export revolutions in other countries. There is no denying the fact that in some cases of revolutionary movements there were blind imitations of the Cuban case and setbacks also followed consequently. It is to be noted that leaders of the revolution themselves rejected any idea of the export of revolution. Guevara said in 1960 : 'It has been made very clear that Cuba does not export revolutions ; revolutions cannot be exported. Revolutions occur at the instant in which a series of insurmountable contradictions appear inside a country. Cuba only exports its example...'<sup>11</sup> The fact remains that Guevara's manual on guerrilla warfare and his advocacy for the same became encouraging lessons for many revolutionaries in different countries of Latin America. The fundamental feature of the influence of Guevarism was that revolutionary guerrilla

movements developed in defiance of the policy of capitulation followed by the established communist parties. The case of the expulsion of Douglas Bravo from the Venezuelan Communist Party in 1967 may be cited in this context. Bravo expressed his support for the strategy of the Tricontinental and became the commander of the Armed Forces of National Liberation. Similar was the case of Cesar Montes who, breaking from the Guatemalan Communist Party in 1968, formed the Rebel Armed Forces and identified with the Guevarist strategy and tactics. In Brazil, Carlos Marighella also expressed his support for the strategy of the organization of the Latin American States in defiance of the Brazilian Communist Party and became in the course of time a leading proponent of urban guerrilla warfare. Mention may be made of the October 8 Revolutionary Movement (NR-8), a left-wing guerrilla group operating in Brazil in the late 1960s and early '70s and also of the Revolutionary Brazilian Communist Party committed to launching armed struggle. The Tupamaros Movement for National Liberation was an extension of the Guevarist strategy in Uruguay in the mid-sixties.<sup>12</sup>

To Guevara, the Cuban Revolution did not appear to be the last word. He could successfully internalize the Marxist concept of proletarian internationalism. He always thought and acted in terms of extending the revolutionary frontier on a continental scale. Consistent with the Marxist notion, his ideas had roots in the Latin American soil and in this sense 'linked up with the "Bolivarist" tradition in Latin America, while giving this tradition a proletarian and socialist content.'<sup>13</sup> On the international plane Guevara identified the principal contradiction between the capitalist bloc dominated by the United States and the socialist bloc with one-third of the world population. There was also another contradiction between the developed capitalist countries and the so-called underdeveloped countries suffering from stagnation and lower economic growth and depending on the former for their survival. Under the circumstances capital flowed from the developed capitalist country to the weaker one and thus wealth and misery went hand in hand. The borrower country was inevitably pushed to such a situation that it was forced to follow the state policy at the sweet will of the superior power.<sup>14</sup> In the face of the changing reality that colonialism had been replaced by direct domination and instead developed in

other countries a parasitic class of bourgeoisie that was least interested in national development but helped the dominating power perpetuate its authority in a disguised manner. This neo-colonial domination is the newer form through which the monopoly capital has been exercising its hegemony over the underdeveloped countries. In his famous Algiers speech in 1965 Guevara made a comprehensive statement in this regard : 'Ever since monopolistic capital appropriated the world, it has maintained most of humanity in poverty, dividing up the profits among the group of the most powerful countries. The standard of living of those countries is based on the misery of ours ; therefore to raise the standard of living of the underdeveloped peoples, it is necessary to fight against imperialism.'<sup>15</sup> Guevara was so much so clear and disillusioned about the so-called welfare motive of the capitalist world that he came down heavily upon the international organizations like the International Monetary Fund, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) and the like. He said, 'The International Monetary Fund is the watchdog of dollar in the capitalist camp ; the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development is the instrument for the infiltration of the United States capital into the underdeveloped world....in reality they are merely fetishes masking the subtlest kinds of instruments for the perpetuation of backwardness and exploitation.'<sup>16</sup> Thus Guevara's strategy of the Latin American revolution was quite logical that since imperialism was a world system, it must be fought on a world scale and in Latin America it would take a continental character. In the fight against imperialism he cited the case of Vietnam as a glorious example. 'The peoples of the three continents focus their attention on Vietnam and learn their lessons. Because imperialists blackmail humanity by threatening it with war, and the wise reaction is not to fear war.' In his 'Message to the Tricontinental' he raised his proverbial slogan, 'create a second or a third Vietnam, or the second and third Vietnam of the World' so that imperialist forces might be cornered from a number of points.'<sup>17</sup>

On the question of the prospect of revolution in the three continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America, Guevara made certain constructive criticisms of the socialist bloc. On the one hand, he challenged the prevailing concepts of peaceful coexistence operating on the international plane : 'As Marxists, we have maintained that

peaceful co-existence between nations does not include co-existence between exploiters and exploited, between oppressors and oppressed.'

There is no difficulty to follow that the target of attack in this case was surely the Soviet Union that stood in a relationship of *detente* with the United States. He went even to the extent of passing a bitter comment that 'the socialist countries have the moral duty of liquidating their tacit complicity with the exploiting countries of the West.' In the second place, he suggested the formation of an anti-imperialist bloc of the developing countries, fighting for their national liberation with the support and sympathy of the socialist bloc under Soviet Union's guidance. A compact bloc of this kind would, in his opinion, curb to a great extent the imperialist dominion. Guevara urged upon the remaking of certain norms in the relations among socialist countries and their relations with developing countries. He insisted that 'foreign trade must not determine politics, but on the contrary, it must be subordinated to a fraternal policy toward people'. Further he added: 'Arms cannot be merchandise in our world.' They should be delivered without any cost whatsoever and in quantities determined by their need and availability to those people who ask for them in order to direct their fight against common enemy.<sup>18</sup>

Guevara was not simply a theoretician, nor was he an idle dreamer. Marxism meant for him praxis. With a view to putting his ideas into practice he made trips to a number of countries in Asia and Africa, and established contacts with the revolutionary organizations there. Even he took active responsibility to organize armed insurrection in the Congo. His tireless efforts culminated in the First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America which met in Havana in January 1966. The fundamental object before this Tricontinental Conference was to intensify the struggle against imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism in order to achieve national independence, and consolidate democracy, social progress and peace. A scrutiny of the resolutions adopted in the Tricontinental Conference would reveal their closest affinity with Guevara's ideas and his 'Message to the Tricontinental' might be said to have provided the basic spirit of the Conference. Out of this conference was born the Organization for the Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL).<sup>19</sup> On the role of the OSPAAAL it was claimed that it (OSPAAAL)

has also effectively supported and encouraged all the guerrillas and the peoples of Latin America in their revolutionary struggle, weapons in hand, inheriting the revolutionary thoughts of Che Guevara, a genuine internationalist and an indomitable revolutionary fighter....'<sup>20</sup>

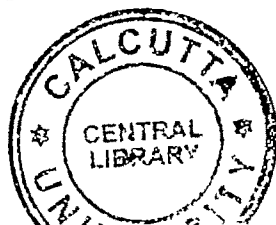
Another important landmark in the building of an organizational set-up for the purpose of extending the revolutionary frontier was the First Conference of the Organization of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS) which was held from July 31 to August 10, 1967. It should be borne in mind that the conference took place at a time when Guevara was badly engaged in the active organization of revolutionary insurrection in Bolivia. His absence did not, however, mean a diminution of the influence of his ideas. That his influence was felt even stronger in the conference was indicated by the fact that Guevara was elected the Honorary President *in absentia* and also declared an honorary citizen of Latin America. It is also important to note that a big portrait of Guevara and also of Simon Bolívar was placed on the stage and the slogan of the conference was inscribed on it: 'The duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution.' The OLAS Conference placed its confidence in the strategy and tactics of the Cuban Revolution and those being followed by Guevara in Bolivia at that time. It also accorded a heroic ovation to Vietnam and put under severe criticism the 'rightist' leadership of the Venezuelan Communist Party. It was quite clear that the OLAS moved along the lines laid down by Guevara. Pointing out the strategic importance of the OLAS, John Gerassi wrote that '... OLAS's task was to spell out the economic, political, cultural and military reasons why armed struggle is necessary and to establish the machinery by which guerrillas in any one country of Latin America can count on the active support of those in any other. Thus OLAS would officially have to reject Russia's "peaceful coexistence" policy; more it would have to explain why such a policy; more it would have to explain why such a policy necessarily leads to a betrayal of the poor and the exploited peoples of the Americas.' In Gerassi's opinion, the first OLAS conference marked 'the birth of a new International' and that of the 'Fifth International.'<sup>21</sup>

What stands out from the foregoing discussions is that Guevara's

concept of revolution and his analysis of contemporary international situation conform to the Marxist approach to the same. Consistent with the revolutionary praxis he thought and acted in terms of translating his ideas in practical terms. During the period of socialist construction in Cuba in the early sixties Guevara proved his worth as a marxist economist committed to boosting up production in an infant socialist state while at the same time trying hard to build up socialist morality. When he decided to withdraw himself from official responsibilities in Cuba and engage himself in organizing insurrectionary movements in Bolivia, he was equally sincere and resolute. Cuba provided him the opportunity to develop into a revolutionary; Bolivia offered him the scope to put his revolutionary vision into practice independently of the Cuban revolutionary process, leading ultimately to the growth of Guevarism which gathered strength particularly after his tragic death in Bolivia. Political situation in Bolivia resembled that in Cuba before 1959 in the sense that the Bolivian Communist Party (PCB), like all other communist parties in Latin America that used to enjoy the official patronage of the international communist leadership, was totally apathetic to Guevara's insurrectionary move from the beginning. It was a matter of fact that Bolivian Communist Party was the proven collaborator of the Barrientos regime and also followed the constitutional-legal road to power, and its aversion to armed struggle was consequential. (Even if it agreed to any form of change in the system it was not at all ready to share with any other organization the credit for the same). When there were bilateral talks between Mario Monje, chief of the PCB, and Guevara the moot point of discussion was the question of political and military leadership that Monje declined to leave in favour of Guevara because the proposed revolution would take place in Bolivia. Guevara's *Diary in Bolivia* bears testimony to this fundamental disagreement: '....I could not accept it in any way. I would be the military chief and would not accept ambiguities concerning this. Here the discussion turned into a stalemate and ended up in a vicious circle.'<sup>22</sup> His argument was based on the simple fact that the PCB lacked any experience in armed struggle which Guevara could claim quite legitimately. Not only the PCB ceased co-operating but it

became up and doing to frustrate the whole plan. Guevara gave its clear exposure in his monthly analysis of January, 1967 : 'As is to be expected, Monje's attitude was evasive at first and later on treacherous. The party is now taking up arms against us....' <sup>22</sup> Even Monje and his party actively restrained young militants from joining Guevara's guerrilla group. <sup>23</sup> The reasons for this discouraging attitude of the PCB is not difficult to follow. Guevara had then already gone a long way to earn the wrath of the Soviet Union in respect of his role either in the socialist construction of Cuba or in promoting the cause of continental revolution through armed struggle. It was not unnatural that the PCB, enjoying the recognition of the CPSU, acted at the insistence of the Soviet Union pursuing then the policy of peaceful coexistence. Guevara also made contacts with other left political parties for assistance but his efforts bore no fruit.

Mention should be made of some other factors that would highlight Guevara's vision of continental revolution. He tried to attribute a continental character to his guerrilla column in Bolivia. At the beginning, of the forty-four members there were seventeen Cubans, twenty-two Bolivians, three Peruvians and two Argentinians. Guevara was equally interested in making contacts with Bertrand Russell and Sartre for mobilizing the international opinion in favour of the struggle. This does not mean that he underrated the Bolivian national potential for igniting the revolutionary flame. On the contrary, he concentrated upon the recruitment of Bolivians and their poor recruitment worried Guevara all the time. <sup>24</sup> In his broader strategy of continental revolution Bolivia was to be an important part and, viewed in an international perspective, proletarians of other nations would surely have a role to play in it. Richard Gett hammered the right point : 'There is some evidence to suggest that the Cubans were meant to be there chiefly in a training and advisory capacity, and that the base at Nancahuasú was to be used as a training base for guerrilla fighters who would subsequently branch off to the *focus* in Peru and Argentina.' <sup>25</sup> Thus the determination of Guevara's continental strategy and the selection of Bolivia as the breeding ground for it were neither casual nor coincidental. Strategic location, political situation, Guevara's acquaintance with the land and a number of other factors prompted Guevara to take up Bolivia





as a model country for his projected continental revolution. There is no denying the fact that his mission in Bolivia ended in disaster but this should not lead a serious observer to conclude that it was doomed to failure from the start simply because he could not come off with flying colours. In fact, no single factor can be identified as the only cause for such a failure. Betrayal and sabotage of the PCB, national-political situation in Bolivia, lack of peasant-incorporation into the guerrilla column, the action of the Bolivian Rangers trained in counter-insurgency techniques by American military personnel and shipment of American arms to Bolivia, even the lack of simple anti-asthmatic medicine—all took their toll in their own way. Detailed discussion of these factors is outside the scope of this paper but it may be said that a coincidence of a number of factors worked for the liquidation of the National Liberation Army.

The basic philosophy behind Guevara's ideas was his profound love for man. Man and humanist values were, to him, the measure of all his activities and marked a distinct departure from bourgeois humanist values when considered in the light of Marxism or the emerging socialist society of Cuba. It was his conviction that 'the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality.'<sup>26</sup> Guevara wanted a fighter who is a social reformer that he takes up arms responding to the angry protest of the people against their oppressors and that he fights in order to change the social system that keeps all his unarmed brothers in ignominy and misery.<sup>27</sup> Since morality and ethics appeared as the most important phenomena in his ideas and activities, 'a moral conduct' and 'an austerity born of rigid self-control' brought newer dimensions to a guerrilla fighter, ultimately making him an ascetic. What added to the success of a guerrilla fighter was the dissemination of his ideas to other people, thus inspiring them with the same revolutionary spirit of combat.<sup>28</sup> It is this feeling of love that helps a revolutionary internalize the essence of the concept of proletarian internationalism and he feels anguish when a man is assassinated in any corner of the world, and feels elation when in some corner of the world a new banner of liberty is raised and for this reason he considers 'any aggression as one committed on us, any affront, any act that goes against the dignity of a man, against his happiness anywhere in the world.'<sup>29</sup> Guevara's

visualized that a guerrilla fighter possessed a distinctive ability of developing himself into a Communist man or the 'twenty-first-century man' as he called him. He was basically convinced about the necessary transformation of human nature because a man with a decadent culture could not afford to be the torch-bearer of the new socialist society.

Thus, to Guevara, the task of reorienting people's minds with new ideas was equally important with the arduous process of socialist construction. He pointed out, convincingly that 'we must work on people's way of thinking by hammering away at their minds and demonstrating what we are capable of doing. We must demonstrate what a revolutionary movement is capable of when it is in power and is sure of its ultimate objective ;....'<sup>30</sup> In fact, what the leaders of the Cuban Revolution sought to do was to effect a change in people's attitude and work, to create a situation where people would be able to produce free from any physical compulsion of selling himself as a commodity. Guevara claimed that 'today in our Cuba, everyday work takes on new meaning. It is done with new happiness.'<sup>31</sup> His conviction combined with obvious, optimistic tinge suggested that the steady development of this new attitude would in practice lead to the creation of his projected new man who 'becomes happy to feel himself a cog in the wheel, a cog which has its own characteristics.... a cog which has its own motor, and which constantly tries to push itself harder and harder to carry to a happy conclusion one of the premises of the construction of socialism creating a sufficient quantity of consumer goods for the entire population.'<sup>32</sup> It should be taken into account that Guevara never wanted to create 'docile workers' or parrots but hinted clearly at the process of progressive disalienation that would provide wider possibilities for the development of his 'twenty-first-century man' but he was not inclined to leave the process on some 'mechanical' forces of the system of socialist production. He put emphasis upon the reorientation of the system of education that would make the people free from the vestiges of the old society. He advocated strongly for the introduction of moral incentives instead of material incentives in the field of production with a view to eradicating the norms of the market economy and building up, at the same time, the communist values of the new man. With this object

in view Guevara emphasized the need for contributing voluntary labour which would be acting as a 'vehicle of union and of comprehension'<sup>33</sup> between manual and intellectual workers, thereby paving the way for the acquiring of communist values by the new men developing gradually in the Cuban society. The degree and kind of interpenetration between new forms of consciousness and values, and the system of socialist production aided by the advancement of technology would determine the pace of the process of progressive disalienation tuned with evolving the twenty-first-century man.

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## **The Supreme Court and the Federal Process in India**

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The process of federalizing takes a long time and many factors contribute to the evolution of the federal system. The judiciary also takes an important part in this process in many federal countries. The function of the judiciary in respect of restraining the executive and the legislature acting beyond their jurisdictions gets an added dimension in a federal country as the different governments and their agencies need to be kept within their respective limits specified in the country's constitution. The interpretation of the provisions of the constitution by the judiciary goes a long way in influencing the evolution of the federal system of a country.

It is true that the judiciary has not been entrusted with this function in all federal countries to the same degree. But in several federations including that of the USA this function is performed by the judiciary. In the USA although there is no clear mentioning of this function in the constitution, it has been assumed by the US Supreme Court itself. Chief Justice Marshall of the US Supreme Court claimed this power for the Supreme Court in *Marbury V. Madison* (1803) and since then the Supreme Court there has been using it. The legal basis of this power is to be traced in Art. VI of the US Constitution which declares the supremacy of the Constitution of the US over any other legislation.

In the Constitution of India comparatively clearer references are to be noted regarding the role of the Supreme Court as the guardian and interpreter of the Constitution. But the actual role played by the Supreme Court in developing the federal system in India is much less significant as compared to that of its counterpart in the United States. The power, commonly referred to as 'judicial review', implies that the

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Judiciary has the power of testing the validity of legislative and other governmental actions with reference to the provisions of the Constitution which is the paramount law of the country.<sup>1</sup>

Three different types of judicial review performed by the Supreme Court in India are :

- (i) Judicial review regarding inter-governmental relations ;
- (ii) Judicial review for determining relationship between the different organs of government ;
- (iii) Judicial review regarding infringement of fundamental rights.

The Supreme Court has taken a more important role in the case of the last two items, while as regards the first one its role is much restrained. The discussion here will be restricted to the first aspect of judicial review and consequent judicial interpretation. Moreover, the advisory opinion rendered by the Supreme Court may also influence the federal process. While the US Supreme Court declined to exercise the advisory function, the Supreme Courts in Canada and India exercise this function with important effects.

It has been pointed out by many writers that one-sided enumeration of power in the USA made judicial interpretation in favour of the federal government easier and consequently provided greater scope for helping in the evolution of the federal system. On the contrary, the triple enumeration of powers limited the scope of such wide interpretation in India. Moreover, the incorporation of centralising provisions in the Constitution itself diminish the requirement of giving wide interpretation to constitutional provisions.

The extreme rigidity of the Constitution of the United States is another factor in increasing the importance of the Supreme Court. It is the Supreme Court which made the eighteenth century-distribution of powers workable under the twentieth century conditions by providing liberal interpretations to it and introducing such doctrines as the doctrine of Implied powers. In two comparatively recent cases, the US Supreme Court has held that the Congress is competent to legislate on any subject which is of national concern and is necessary for the welfare of the nation.<sup>2</sup>

In India the situation is different. If any constitutional provision does not suit the requirements of the situation, an amendment may

be effected to it without much difficulty. So the duty of making constitutional provisions applicable through the provision of liberal interpretations does not fall on the Supreme Court in India.

Certain types of disputes between different governments which often form a tangled problem demanding solution in a federal country have been left outside the purview of the Indian Supreme Court. Inter-state boundary disputes, or the problem of settling paramountcy over submerged lands on the coast do not require the Supreme Court's intervention in India. The issue of paramountcy over submerged lands engaged the attention of the Supreme Court in the USA in the early years of her federal government.<sup>3</sup> Boundaries of the states in India can be altered by ordinary parliamentary legislation<sup>4</sup> and rights to lands underlying the ocean belong to the Union.<sup>5</sup>

The incorporation of detailed provisions in respect of emergency, trade, commerce and intercourse naturally restrict the scope of judicial interpretation in India. In the USA in Art. I. Sec. 8 there is only one sub-section which vests in the Congress the power to regulate commerce with foreign nations and among the several states while a whole part consisting of seven Articles has been included in the Indian Constitution. These differences point to the differences in the scope of their interpretation. Samuel Krislov<sup>6</sup> has pointed out that Chief Justice Marshall from the very beginning suggested that the 'commerce clause' was complete in itself, as fully granted as if there were a unitary system prevailing. But the scope of such assumption is absent in India, although it must be admitted that much depends upon the interpretation provided to the provisions. That the framers of the Indian Constitution wanted to restrict the scope of judicial interpretation is evident from the following statement made by Shri Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar in the Constituent Assembly :

"In view of the complexity of industrial, trade and financial conditions in the modern world and the need for large-scale defence programmes, there is an inevitable tendency in every federation in the direction of strengthening the federal government. The Draft Constitution in several of its provisions has taken note of these tendencies instead of leaving it to the Supreme Court to strengthen the Centre by a process of judicial interpretation."

Apart from these differences the dominance of a single political party at the helm of the state for a considerably long period of time

provided an alternative channel for solving issues affecting inter-governmental relations. In the words of the Study Team appointed by the Administrative Reforms Commission,

“Where a single party has control over affairs at the Centre as well as in the States an alternative and extra-constitutional channel becomes available for the operation of Centre-State relations. In practice this channel has been very active during the Congress Party rule and has governed the tenor of Centre-State relations”.<sup>8</sup>

That is to say, the operation of one-party dominance system has contributed to the diminution of the influence of the Supreme Court on the federal process in India.

On the contrary, as Schubert<sup>9</sup> has mentioned that one of the reasons behind the pre-eminent role of the Supreme Court as an arbiter between the national and state governments is the structure of the American political party system in relation to the electoral college and to the internal organization and rules of procedure of the American Congress. The President and the Congress are generally impotent to take an effective stand against the disparate parochial interests that control them except in periods of national crisis.

Besides these, in India the disputes relating to waters of interstate rivers may be treated by an ad hoc tribunal created on the basis of Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956 passed under Art. 262 of the Constitution. The jurisdiction of the Supreme Court is barred in case a dispute is referred to such a tribunal.<sup>10</sup>

The federal government in the USA is helpless in situations when the States will not comply with national policy. Only when it can be demonstrated that the States will not implement the provisions of the Constitution as interpreted by the Supreme Court it is possible for the federal government to intervene.<sup>11</sup> Thus the decision of the Supreme Court on the question of desegregation of public schools was of immense importance in the USA in solving the problem of federal policy implementation in the face of opposition from the southern States. But the Supreme Court of India will not face such problems.

That the Indian Supreme Court is to serve as the guardian and interpreter of the Constitution can be deduced from several of its provisions. In the first place, the Constitution expressly states that



laws inconsistent with fundamental rights shall be void. ( Art. 13 ). Secondly, the Supreme Court possesses exclusive original jurisdiction to decide conflicts between the different sets of governments ( Art. 131 ); and thirdly, there is the provision that any case may go on appeal to the Supreme Court if it involves a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution and if the High Court certifies to that effect ( Art. 132 ). Moreover, the law declared by the Supreme Court shall be binding on all courts in India ( Art. 141 ). In addition to this, the Supreme Court possesses the power of rendering advisory opinion on any question of law or fact which because of its nature and public importance is referred to it by President of India ( Art. 143 ). Although technically,<sup>12</sup> this power does not constitute judicial review, i.e., power to annul a law which has already been enacted on the ground of unconstitutionality, it can leave great impact on the federal process as the interpretation of Constitutional provisions made in such connection and its opinion on the legality of action of different governments guides the ways of their functioning.

The functioning of the Supreme Court shows that it has moved with caution. The instances of litigation between the different governments are few where the Supreme Court has moved with a bias for the Centre. As regards the interpretation of the Constitution, it has shown efforts to hold the scales even for both the Centre and the federal units. But there also it is not done uniformly.

The attitude of the Supreme Court regarding the nature of Indian federalism has been clearly manifested in *State of West Bengal V. The Union of India* ( 1963 )—the first case of direct conflict between the Union and a State.<sup>13</sup> In it the West Bengal government challenged the competence of the Union Parliament to enact sections 4 and 7 of the Coal Bearing Areas ( Acquisition and Development ) Act, 1957, which sought to acquire coal bearing lands and rights over them vested in the State. The contention of the State of West Bengal was that as members of a federal country the States shared sovereignty with the Union and therefore the Union Parliament could not enact legislation depriving the States of the property vested in them.

In dealing with this contention the Court sought to prove the deviations of the Indian federalism from the normal characteristics of a federation. It went into the historical background of the Constitution

and analysed the unitary features of the Constitution in order to prove that it was not truly federal in nature.

In the first place it was argued: "A truly federal form of government envisages a compact or agreement between independent and sovereign units to surrender partially their authority in their common interest and vesting it in a Union and retaining the residue of the authority in the Constituent Units."<sup>14</sup>

Again it was argued that in view of the large powers of Parliament "it would be difficult to hold that the Parliament which is competent to destroy a State on account of some assumptions as to absolute sovereignty of the State is incompetent effectively to acquire by legislation designed for that purpose the property owned by the State for governmental purpose."<sup>15</sup>

All these arguments show some preconceived notions regarding the nature of federalism in our country. The character of a federation does not depend upon the process of its formation.<sup>16</sup> It is only a superficial characteristic of the American federation. Whatever be the mode of formation, once it is formed the co-existence of two sets of government with clearly defined authority is essential.

Secondly, the large powers of Parliament, doubtless, add to the peculiarity of our federal structure. But it is not enough to remove it from the category of federal States. In this connection D. D. Basu has made a very pertinent observation :

"The decision of our Supreme Court in the case of *State of West Bengal V. Union of India*, it is submitted, is a glaring example in this country of a judgment guided by an *a priori* assumption, namely, that in the case of a conflict between national and State power the former must prevail. However desirable this objective of national solidarity may be in a country torn asunder by heterogenous disintegrating forces, the question before us is whether this assumption is legally warranted by the provisions of the Constitution."<sup>17</sup>

This assumption of supremacy of the federal government is also evident in another famous case—*State of Rajasthan V. Union of India*. (1977)<sup>18</sup>

When in 1977, the Janata Party took over power from the Congress Party in the Centre the then Home Minister wrote a letter to the Chief Ministers of nine States, then controlled by the Congress party, advising them to arrange for dissolving their respective assem-

blies and seek fresh mandate from the electorate. Six out of such nine States filed suits in the Supreme Court under Art. 131 praying for an injunction restraining the Central government permanently from taking any steps for dissolving the State legislative assemblies and also prayed for a declaration that the letter of the Home Minister was illegal and ultra vires of the Constitution. The Supreme Court dismissed the suit on the ground that there was no triable cause of action. But it examined the problem of intervention by the Union government and was of the opinion that any such direction was not illegal and was within the scope of Articles 257 and 365.

Some of the observations made by the Supreme Court in this connection clearly show its viewpoint regarding the nature of federalism and the position of the central government in our country. In the words of Chief Justice Beg :

"A conspectus of the provisions of the Constitution will indicate that whatever appearances of a federal structure our Constitution may have, its operations certainly, judged both by the contents of power which a number of its provisions carry with them and the use that has been made of them, are more unitary than federal. But the extent of federalism in it is largely watered down by the needs of progress and development of a country which has to be nationally integrated, politically and economically co-ordinated and socially, spiritually uplifted. In such a system, the States cannot stand in the way of legitimate and comprehensively planned development of the country in the manner directed by the Central government".<sup>19</sup> The Court held that for the achievement of these purposes strong central directions were inevitable.<sup>20</sup> It was also observed that in the interests of political stability for establishing the confidence of the people in the government of a State the Union government might issue directions to the State government. It was observed further that "a mere attempt to get more political power for a party as a means of pursuing the programme of the party as opposed to that of other parties is not constitutionally prohibited or per se illegal".<sup>21</sup> A different note, however, is discernible in the observation of Mr. Justice Bhagwati when he says that "merely because the ruling party in a State suffers defeat in the elections to the Lok Sabha...by itself can be no ground for saying that government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. ...."

The federal structure under our Constitution clearly postulates that there may be one party in power in the State and another in the Centre."<sup>22</sup>

A perusal of the opinion of the Supreme Court rendered in *State of Karnataka V. The Union of India* (1978) highlights the same points of view.<sup>23</sup> This was also a case under Art. 131 where the State of Karnataka prayed for a declaration that the constitution of a Commission of Enquiry under section 3 of Commissions of Enquiry Act, 1952 enacted by the Union Parliament to go into charges of corruption of the Chief Minister of a State was invalid as it jeopardised federal structure and was based on a law which was passed without the competence of Parliament. The Supreme Court held that entry no. 94 of the Union List and entry no. 45 of the Concurrent List dealt with the question of enquiries. And even if the subject of enquiry against the ministers in State governments was not mentioned specifically in any of the Articles or legislative lists of the Constitution it was Art. 248 which vested residuary powers of legislation to Parliament and brought such legislation within its competence. The argument that Parliament has legislated on Centre-State relationship which is a Constitutional subject is without any force.<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting to note in this connection the opinions rendered by the Canadian Supreme Court regarding some of the references made to it comparatively recently. These opinions show that inspite of the triple enumeration of powers the Court there assumed a positive role in maintaining a balance between the Dominion and the Provinces. In reference regarding legislative authority of Parliament it blocked a law in 1980 which sought to effect a unilateral change in the membership and powers of Senate, i.e., the upper house of Canadian Parliament.<sup>25</sup> The other opinion was rendered in the patriation reference of 1981.<sup>26</sup> The Supreme Court of Canada in this reference checked a proposal of making unilateral request to the British Parliament for patriation of the constitution with an amending formula. Although, legally the Dominion government could do so, it was held that making such a proposal without a substantial measure of provincial support would violate the conventions of the Constitution. And this opinion forced both the federal and provincial governments in Canada to come to terms through discussions. This opinion has been described as an

'epitome of balance'<sup>27</sup> and points to 'the importance of the Supreme Court as an umpire in the Canadian federal system'.<sup>28</sup> Again in 1982 the Court denied that Quebec—the problem province with Francophone majority—could as a matter of convention exercise veto over amendments affecting its powers.<sup>29</sup>

Turning back to India, it is found that apart from the cases of direct conflict between the Union and the States, in cases requiring an interpretation of the Constitutional provisions regarding Union-State relations the Supreme Court has sought to give a liberal construction to them and decided issues in State's favour in some instances. It has accepted the doctrine of pith and substance which helps to introduce an element of flexibility in the distribution of powers. This principle was adopted by the Federal Court of India in *Miss. Kishori Shetti V. the King*. (1950)<sup>30</sup> It has been accepted by the Supreme Court also. The Supreme Court has held that "in construing words in a constitutional enactment conferring legislative power the most liberal construction should be put upon words so that the same may have effects in their widest amplitude."<sup>31</sup> The recognition of this principle has helped the Supreme Court to hold valid State laws which incidentally encroached upon the central field.

In *Calcutta Gas Co. (Proprietary) Ltd. V. The State of West Bengal* (1962)<sup>32</sup> the Supreme Court upheld the power of the State to make laws in respect of gas industry by virtue of entry no. 25 of the State List. In the preceding entry, i. e., entry no. 24 industries have been made controllable by the Union. But as gas works have been mentioned separately, entry no. 24 does not comprehend gas industry. It declared that Industries (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951, insofar as it purported to deal with the gas industry was beyond the legislative competence of the Union Parliament.<sup>33</sup>

But this attitude is not maintained always. In *Gujarat University V. (Sri Krishna) Mudholkar* (1963)<sup>34</sup> it was held that "power of State to legislate in respect of education including Universities must to the extent to which it is entrusted to the Union Parliament, whether such power is exercised or not, be deemed to be restricted."<sup>35</sup> Education was within the State List at the time, although under entry no. 66 of the Union List, Parliament could legislate for determination of standards in institutions for higher education. Although

the Union government did not legislate on the matter, the Supreme Court did not accept the right of Gujarat University to make Gujarati or Hindi the exclusive medium of instruction for higher education. The dissenting judge Mr. Justice Subba Rao pointed to the usefulness of the application of the doctrine of pith and substance in this case.<sup>36</sup> But it was not applied by the majority.

This sort of indecisive approach is to be found in other cases also. As regards the imposition of sales taxes on inter-state trade or commercial taxation the oscillation between the desire to uphold State powers and maintaining Union predominance is manifest.

Freedom of trade, commerce and intercourse is guaranteed under Art. 301 of the Constitution. This freedom, however, is subject to the other provisions of Part XIII of the Constitution. A State may impose reasonable restriction on such freedom in public interest provided however the bill in question was introduced in the legislature with the previous sanction of the President.<sup>37</sup>

In *Atiabari Tea Co. Ltd. V. State of Assam* (1961)<sup>38</sup> the Assam Taxation (on Goods carried by Roads and Inland Waterways) Act, 1954 was challenged on the grounds of its violation of freedom of trade and failure to introduce the bill in the legislature with the prior approval of the President. The law was declared unconstitutional by the majority of judges in the Supreme Court. The position however was redressed to some extent in the *Rajasthan Automobile Transport V. State of Rajasthan* (1962)<sup>39</sup> case. It was held there that not every imposition of a tax amounts to a restriction particularly when regulatory measures of taxation are imposed with a view to facilitating orderly movement. Such measures need not comply with the requirement of obtaining the previous sanction of the President. It has been properly observed that such a view is necessary to safeguard the autonomy of the States within a federal polity and not leaving them totally at the discretion of the Centre.

Such instances could have been multiplied, but mention may be made of at least one more instance which generated much controversy. In *Sea Customs Act* (1963)<sup>40</sup> the Supreme Court by a majority of 5 to 4 upheld the validity of a proposed amending legislation by Parliament. It purported to extend the levy of customs and excise duties by the Union not only on goods imported or produced by the State governments for trade and business purposes but also on properties used for

governmental purposes. Arts. 285 and 289 of the Constitution provide for mutual exemption from taxation of the properties of the Union and the States. It has been correctly observed by Mohammed Imam that the majority has "dealt scantily with the principle of federation and does not seem to have appreciated that but for this notion provisions of Articles 285 and 289 would have had no justification whatsoever in occupying a place in the Constitution."<sup>41</sup>

A review of these judgments and opinions of the Supreme Court brings to light several facts. In the first place, the role of the Supreme Court in developing the federal system is less important in India as compared to those of its American and Canadian counterparts. In spite of the prediction of Mr. Justice Corry of Canada that the Supreme Court there would retire from its post of supervisor of federal balance, it has been continuing to play a significant role in this respect. Canada possesses a scheme of distribution of powers similar to India's. But that does not constitute an obstacle in the way of functioning of the Supreme Court there as the supervisor of federal balance.

Secondly, in cases of conflict between the Union and the States, Union supremacy has been regarded in India as almost axiomatic. The Commission on Centre-State Relations (1988) has pointed out the following reason behind this assumption :

"The need for a strong united India which was the prime objective before the Constitution-framers appears to have been the silent premise dominating the process of adjudication of union-state disputes in these cases."<sup>42</sup>

Thirdly, in interpreting the provisions of the Constitution, although the Supreme Court wanted to provide liberal interpretation and maintain the rights of both sets of government and adopted the doctrine of pith and substance for the purpose, there have been oscillations between the maintenance of State rights and acceptance of Union supremacy. The opinion of the Supreme Court was often divided in this respect.

The fact should not be overlooked that in a country composed of such diverse elements, maintenance of a balance between the interests of the Union and those of the Units is essential, however much Union supremacy may be desirable. In the already-centralized structure of our federal system the predominance of the Union

government may not be fruitful always. The judiciary in a federal country takes an important role in legitimising the outputs of different governments and thereby maintaining a balance between them. In India's case the importance of functioning of the judiciary in moulding the federal process must be realised and that with the extinction of one-party-dominance system the role of the Supreme Court will now be more prominent than before.

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## **The CPI and the 'Imperialist War' (1939-41) : Calcutta—A Review**

Amitabha Chandra\*

### **Prelude**

The outbreak of the Second World War on 3 September 1939 was neither a sudden event, nor was it an unexpected one. The international situation had been quickly deteriorating since 1936. The Munich Crisis made it alarming, and after the Nazi annexation of Czechoslovakia a war between Germany and Britain became almost inevitable. The world was already divided into two hostile blocs, both of which were essentially imperialist and colonialist in character, the Allied and the Axis powers. Although professing different ideological shibboleths, it was essentially for imperialist gains—either for acquiring them or for preserving the *status quo*—that these two blocs got enmeshed in this world-wide conflagration.

The Hitlerite Nazi Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939 and on 3 September Britain and France declared war on Germany, repudiating the policy of appeasing the Nazis pursued by them so long. Thus started the devastating Second World War. Within a few hours of the declaration of war, the Viceroy unilaterally proclaimed India as a belligerent, without even bothering to consult the Central Legislature, the Provincial Ministries or any Indian leader. On the same day was promulgated the Defence of India Ordinance which in the name of defence and public safety sought to destroy every variety of civil liberty. All these naturally caused resentment in India. Different political parties including the Congress regretted the fact that India had been dragged into the war in regard to which the Indian people had continually protested at the policy which had made it inevitable. The Communist Party of India, which was both anti-

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imperialist and anti-Fascist, vehemently criticized the British imperialists for dragging India into the war against the wishes of the Indian people, immediately branded the war as an out and out *imperialist war* and adopted the policy of opposing and resisting the British war-efforts tooth and nail. This policy of the C. P. I. was in complete accord with the prevailing national sentiments. The C. P. I., however, made a fundamental change in its attitude towards the war in December 1941, i.e., six months after the dastardly attack of German Nazism on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. The present paper attempts to make a review of the policy and role of the C. P. I. during the first phase, i.e., the 'imperialist war' phase of the Second World War, with a special reference to its activities in the megalopolis of Calcutta during the period.

"The present war is an imperialist war—Resist the efforts of the British imperialists."—*C. P. I.*

Long before the formal declaration of the Second World War, the C. P. I. had been opposing the impending war and had been warning the countrymen against the evil design of the British imperialists to drag India into the war. One of the C. P. I. pamphlets, *To All Anti-Imperialist Fighters : Gathering Storm*, probably written by Gangadhar Adhikari, a member of the C. P. I. Politbureau, and published in December 1936, held the view :

"The zero hour is fast approaching. Soon the fascist and the imperialist states will plunge the world into a bloody conflict. British imperialism will be in the midst of war crisis and confusion. India's opportunity would arrive..... Let us now begin to forge that mighty weapon of the United Front, with which alone we could conquer".<sup>1</sup>

It was commented in the Editorial, entitled 'Indis must resist war', of the *National Front*, the organ of the illegal C. P. I., 3 September 1939 :

"But India's determination to resist War must not be slackened..... And as long as there is a single Congressman (the Communists were then members of the Congress—the author), as long as there are millions of our countrymen full of hatred against Imperialism, war-resistance must continue".<sup>2</sup>

The Communist International had long been following a strict anti-imperialist, anti-Fascist and anti-War line. After the outbreak of the Second World War on 3 September 1939, the Comintern published its anti-war document, *The War And The Working Class*<sup>3</sup>, written by Georgi Dimitrov, which characterized the war as the 'Second Imperialist War',<sup>4</sup> and asked the workers of all countries to oppose it resolutely. It held:

"As the war goes on, all the Communist Parties, all working class organisations, all active workers are put to the supreme test. ...The imperialists of the warring countries have begun the war for a new partition of the earth, for world domination, dooming millions of people to destruction. The working class is called upon to put an end to the War after its own fashion, in its own interests, in the interests of the whole of labouring mankind and thereby to destroy once and for all the fundamental causes giving rise to imperialist wars."<sup>5</sup>

Thus the Comintern exploded the myth built up by the British and French imperialists that they had been fighting a war of democracy against fascism and Nazism.

Following the Comintern line, the C.P.I. raised the political slogan—"No co-operation in this second imperialist war". The party popularized the slogan:

"Eie Larai Samrajshahi,  
Hum Na Denge Ek Pai,  
Na Ek Pai, Na Ek Bhai."<sup>6</sup>

("Neither a farthing, nor a brother in this imperialist war".)

The *National Front*, 8 October 1939, made it very clear—"No. This is not a war for democracy. It is the second imperialist war, the heir and the successor of the first of 1914-18."<sup>7</sup>

During the period the C.P.I. published different anti-imperialist, anti-Fascist and anti-war pamphlets, leaflets and literature, most of which became proscribed soon after their publication. One such important C.P.I. pamphlet, *The Second Imperialist War*, written by Gangadhar Adhikari, the C.P.I. Politbureau member, which contained in details the C.P.I.'s attitude towards the war, and naturally became proscribed as a result, laid emphasis on "fighting against the present war-mongering government" and raised a very important war-time political slogan—"Convert Imperialist War into a Democratic War",<sup>8</sup>

"Make a revolutionary utilisation of the war crisis and launch an anti-imperialist mass struggle for the achievement of national freedom"—C.P.I.

With the outbreak of World War II, the C.P.I., along with giving a call for war-resistance, laid a special emphasis on making a revolutionary utilization of the war-crisis and launching an immediate anti-imperialist mass struggle for the achievement of national independence. With this end in view, the party started a massive all-India campaign.

In October 1939 the Politbureau of the C.P.I. adopted a very important political resolution, entitled the "Statement of the Politbureau on C.P.I. Policy and Tasks in the Period of War", which was published in the November 1939 issue of *The Communist* (Vol. II, No. 1), the underground central organ of the illegal Party.<sup>9</sup> The "Statement" contained the attitude of the C.P.I. towards the war, its evaluation of the Imperialist British Government, the Congress and its leadership, international political forces, etc., and the role to be played by the Party during the war.

At the outset the "Statement" held: "The war that is raging in Europe to-day is not a war of democracy against fascism. It is an imperialist war—the second imperialist war, the heir and successor of the last Great War of 1914-18".<sup>10</sup> The "Statement" gave the clarion call—"Revolutionary Fight for Peace—Transform Imperialist War into Civil War—Defend the Soviet Union."<sup>11</sup> The "Statement" further enjoined on C.P.I. the task of mobilizing the masses for launching the decisive and final assault upon the British imperialists for the sake of attaining national independence.

The second part of the resolution, entitled the "National Political Tasks", quite unequivocally stated—"Revolutionary utilisation of the war crisis for the achievement of national freedom—this is the central task before the national forces in the new period."<sup>12</sup> "The Revolutionary Perspective" portion of the "Statement" held:

"...Thus opens up the perspective of transformation of imperialist war into war of national liberation.

This perspective must be brought before the entire national movement... Capture of power is an immediately realisable goal—a goal for which preparations must be begun in right earnest."<sup>13</sup>

The "Statement" further gave the very important call—"Give Proletarian Impress to the National Struggle."<sup>14</sup> The "Statement" severely criticized the compromising and vacillating character of the Congress leadership :

"...the dominant leadership of the Congress does not want to use the weapon of mass struggle : it wants to utilise the war crisis for striking a hard bargain with imperialism without struggle."<sup>15</sup>

But at the same time the "Statement" made it amply clear that although the rightist Congress leadership had been treacherously making a secret deal with the British imperialists, thereby betraying the anti-imperialist mass movement, still the Communists should not leave the Congress in order to start a struggle on their own, rather they should make their utmost attempt to "move Congress as a whole towards mass struggle"<sup>16</sup>:

"All our anti-war activities to-day ( during the period of the continuance of the stalemate), viz., protest strikes, local anti-war actions, demonstrations, mass distribution of literature, anti-war propaganda must have as their main objective, the creation of such powerful anti-war sentiment among the people in general and the masses of Congressmen in particular as would move the Congress itself towards struggle."<sup>17</sup>

The "Statement" enjoined on the Communists the task of providing a revolutionary character to the countrywide mass movement, but they should do that as the loyal Congressmen, remaining inside the Congress :

"Henceforth our chief task shall be to give the mass movement revolutionary content and form..... We shall be able to direct the movement into revolutionary channels only in the measures in which we have embedded ourselves in the Congress and have won confidence of the masses of Congressmen by our leadership of the existing forms of struggle decided upon by the Congress."<sup>18</sup>

Thus a study of the "Statement", containing the war-time C. P. I. policy and tasks, convinces its readers that although the C. P. I. made a sharp criticism of the Congress leadership, it spared the Congress as a political organization from any criticism ; the C. P. I. rather laid

stress on the organizational unity of the Congress and launched a blistering attack upon those who left the Congress. During the period of the imperialist war, the main call of the C. P. I. was—"Shatter the shackles of the reformist Gandhian technique, the Congress should not be allowed to make any compromise with the British imperialists."

The basic C. P. I. argument was repeated in all its subsequent brochures published during the period, but the Congress reluctance to launch any real mass anti-imperialist struggle, Roy's surrender to British imperialism in the name of "anti-Fascism" and the other leftist parties' mere lip-service to struggle had been making the C.P.I. criticism of the leadership of the Congress and other leftist parties increasingly sharper. In this context a study of two C.P.I. documents seems essential.

*The Proletarian Path and the Unmasked-Parties & Politics*

In August 1940 the Central Committee of the C.P.I. published a document: *The Proletarian Path—Inside The National Front*.<sup>19</sup> It was probably written by Ajoy Kumar Ghosh and published by the Central Committee, after being approved by the Politbureau consisting of four members—P. C. Joshi, the General Secretary, Gangadhar Adhikari, Ajoy Kumar Ghosh and R. D. Bharadwaj. *The Proletarian Path* chalked out the basic tasks and strategy of the C.P.I. during the war period. It held: "India has to make revolutionary use of the war crisis to achieve her own freedom."<sup>20</sup> It continued:

"...achievement of national independence, conquest of power by the Indian people becomes the immediate task....."

Political general strike in the major industries together with countrywide no-rent and no-tax action constitute the first steps towards this objective.....

Confronting each other will stand two forces—the armed might of British imperialism and the mightier forces of national revolution. The national movement will enter into a new and higher phase—the phase of *armed insurrection*.<sup>21</sup>

The document further stated—"In order to develop the national movement to this revolutionary level, the Communists shall make the most extensive use of the weapon of *mass strike*."<sup>22</sup>

Regarding the Gandhian technique of Satyagraha, the document critically commented :

"Satyagraha cannot bring about revolutionary culmination of the national movement and hence Communists definitely reject it as a weapon in the struggle for freedom. Nevertheless, the organised forces of the workers, peasants and students are to-day so mature and so powerful, that by their independent action, they can transform mass Satyagraha into mass revolutionary movement. Therefore, far from opposing mass Satyagraha, Communists shall actively work to bring about such situation as makes the Congress give the call for mass struggle—even of the Satyagraha variety."<sup>23</sup>

But the document made a scathing denunciation of Gandhism, branding it as "a disruptive force", and gave the call for "political exposure of Gandhism" and even "struggle against Gandhism."<sup>24</sup>

The document concluded with the following comment :

"The Communist Party of India in this period of war and revolutionary crisis concentrates all its efforts in making possible a national united struggle against the enemy of the Indian people, the chief war-incendiary, the main prop of world capitalist reaction, the inveterate foe of Socialism and the Soviet Union, namely British Imperialism. The Communist Party of India fights against compromise, for national unity, for the proletarian path of mass revolutionary struggle."<sup>25</sup>

Thus *The Proletarian Path* attempted something innovative. It laid stress on "armed insurrection" and "revolutionary seizure of state power". It hinted at the role of arms and armed forces in the making of the "revolution with a Communist, proletarian impress", visualized as the inevitable outcome of the war-crisis. Furthermore, it laid emphasis on an "authentic Indo-centric Communism", i.e., not the mere mechanistic application of Communism, rather Communism from the viewpoint of the hard realities of Indian social, political and ideological life.<sup>26</sup>

In March 1940 the C.P.I. published the document, *Unmasked—Parties & Politics—Communists Call A Conference—To Discuss War & India's Independence*.<sup>27</sup> In their articles appearing in this document, P. C. Joshi, Gangadhar Adhikari and Ajoy Kumar Ghosh critically



analysed the policies, programmes and role of different political parties during the war period, pointed out the root of the disunity among the leftists and launched a blistering and sarcastic attack upon Gandhi, Jaiprakash and the C.S.P., Manabendra Nath Roy, and Subhas Chandra Bose and his Forward Bloc. In these aggressive articles it was stated that although these leaders had continuously been paying lip-service to struggle, none of them would launch any real anti-imperialist mass struggle for the sake of attaining national independence. Gandhi and the Congress leadership were severely criticized for vacillation and compromise and Gandhism was considered to be a stumbling block in the path of any struggle; the C.S.P. led by Jaiprakash was criticized for its abject surrender to Gandhism; Roy was branded a masked compromiser and was condemned for advocating unconditional co-operation in the British war-efforts and Roy's line was considered to be even more reactionary than the line of Gandhism; and Bose was considered "not a leftist, but an opportunist", and was attacked for intensifying disruption.<sup>25</sup>

The Communists, however, attended the annual Congress session at Ramgarh in March 1940 and did not join the "Anti-Compromise conference" which Bose had called at Ramgarh at the time of the annual Congress session.

#### *How the C.P.I. Implemented its Policy of War-Resistance and Struggle for National Independence*

In order to implement its policy of war-resistance and struggle for national independence, the C.P.I. adopted the following programmes. (1) The C.P.I. conducted massive anti-war campaign throughout the whole of India under the slogan—"Na ek Pai, na ek Bhai (neither a pie, nor a brother) in this Imperialist War." (2) The C. P. I. also made an all-India campaign for immediately starting an anti-imperialist mass struggle for the achievement of national freedom. (3) The C. P. I. laid stress on organizing "local and partial struggles" which could be converted into an all-India freedom struggle. (4) The Party sought to organize anti-war workers' strikes and anti-war political general strikes under its leadership in different parts of India. On October 2, 1939, 90,000 Bombay textile workers, at the call of the C. P. I., carried out a one-day political strike against the

war and the repressive measures of imperialism, the first of its kind in the world during the Second World War.<sup>29</sup> Thus started a process of anti-war protest strikes organized by the C. P. I., which continued intermittently all through 1940.<sup>30</sup> (5) The Party gave a stirring call to the workers and peasants to resort to the path of strikes and struggles for realizing their own economic demands. (6) The C. P. I. campaigned for the release of all political prisoners and against the governmental encroachment on civil liberties and tried to organize movements on their basis.

Although *The Proletarian Path* laid stress on "armed insurrection" and hinted at the "revolutionary seizure of state power", in reality nowhere in India the C. P. I. made any such attempt. Of course the Party lacked the requisite strength to make such an attempt. The whole thing remained restricted to the level of propaganda. As later admitted by Joshi himself,

"We had no illusions that a single party like ours could start a national struggle. All our attention was directed to create the general atmosphere in the country and those conditions among the sections of the people we led that might help the Congress to take the lead."<sup>31</sup>

If these were "illusions", as stated by Joshi, then *The Proletarian Path*, no doubt, spread such "illusions" by giving a call for "armed insurrection". That the Congress led by Gandhi would never start a struggle culminating in "armed insurrection" was only obvious. Still the C.P.I. gave a call for "armed insurrection", on the one hand, and relied on the Congress to start and lead a national struggle, on the other.

Still the already illegal C. P. I. had to bear the brunt of the British imperialist offensive. The British Government resorted to "the most effective repression yet undertaken against the Communist movement in India, although it was not so publicly dramatic as the Cawnpore or Meerut trials."<sup>32</sup> On March 15, 1940, the Central Government announced that it had determined to "pass orders for the detention of the main Communist leaders under the Defence of India Rules" as the Communists "by means of subversive propaganda and in other organized ways, have attempted to prejudice the internal peace of India and to interfere with the efficient prosecution of the war

by impeding the supply of men and material."<sup>33</sup> A countrywide round-up of the communists and other leftists promptly started. In January 1941 Reginald Maxwell, the Home Member, declared that of the 700 detained without trial "about 480 persons were... either acknowledged communists or active supporters of the communist programme of violent mass revolution."<sup>34</sup> The communist press was muzzled. The *National Front* and *Kranti* were banned. The communists had to go underground to carry on their anti-war activities.

*Anti-War Campaign and Activities of the CPI in Calcutta and the Imperialist Offensive*

Now let us turn our attention from the all-India scene to the city of Calcutta. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the Bengal Provincial Committee of the C. P. I., the Calcutta District Committee and all other District Committees, which were working under the supervision of the Bengal Committee, started vigorous anti-war campaign among the people, concentrated on anti-war activities and endeavoured to build up struggles that would lead to national freedom. But the lack of requisite strength prevented the Bengal Communists from organizing any such struggle and their war-resistance remained restricted to massive anti-war campaign.

The main weapon in the armoury of the Bengal Communists was the publication of a series of anti-war brochures, pamphlets and leaflets. These were published either by the Bengal Provincial Committee, or by the Calcutta District Committee or by other District Committees. In all those literatures the Bengal Communists gave the call to the people to smash the British war-machine and to start an immediate struggle for national freedom. The pamphlets issued by the Bengal Communists were attacking in their tone and the language was especially very severe with regard to the attack upon Gandhi and the Congress. In respect of launching an immediate struggle for freedom, the Bengal Communists were more energetic and more militant than the central leadership. The central leadership stressed the need for a slow and cautious advance and warned that nothing should be sacrificed through undue haste or lack of caution.<sup>35</sup> By contrast the Bengal Communists were eager to start an immediate struggle for freedom. As a result a serious difference of opinion

arose between the Bengal Committee of the C. P. I. and the Politbureau. The main cause of the difference was that while the central leadership did not accept the idea of a break with the Congress Working Committee on any issue of a provincial nature, the Bengal Committee was strongly of the opinion that the Congress would not initiate any all-India struggle, as desired by the central leadership, and in the absence of any immediate struggle, politics in Bengal would soon become defunct. Moreover, taking leadership in Bengal would not be possible any longer without being actively involved in an actual struggle against the British Government. The Bengal communists strongly opined that the beginning of a struggle in Bengal would force the Congress Working Committee to take up a similar movement throughout India. The Bengal communists repeatedly urged Subhas Chandra Bose to start a struggle and sought the permission of the central leadership to launch the movement in Bengal against the war and for national freedom under the leadership of Bose.<sup>36</sup> The central leadership refused the permission on the ground that only the Congress would give the call for the national struggle and any such struggle without the Congress would disrupt the national unity. Thus the Bengal communists had to remain contented with giving the call for militant anti-war struggle.

During the period of the 'imperialist war', the Bengal Provincial Committee and the Calcutta District Committee published numerous anti-war pamphlets and leaflets, very militant in content, which were proscribed immediately after their publication. Here only a few of them are mentioned: *Imperialist War and the Communist Party's Declaration*<sup>37</sup>, *Organisation, Demand and Struggle of Mill Workers in the War Market*,<sup>38</sup> *During the War Fight for Independence—Proclamation of Communist Party on November Revolution Day*,<sup>39</sup> *Communist Party's Call to the Students*,<sup>40</sup> *Communist Party's Call to Students*<sup>41</sup> (two separate leaflets), *Fight for Civil Rights, Agitate for the fight for freedom, Appeal of the Communist Party*,<sup>42</sup> *26th January, Friday—Independence Day—Declaration of the Communist Party*,<sup>43</sup> *Appeal of the Communist Party to every man and woman in Bengal*,<sup>44</sup> *Communist Party's Call to Seamen, Port and Dock Workers*,<sup>45</sup> *Champions of the People Struck—Hurl Back the Offensive*,<sup>46</sup> *Communist Pantha (Communist Line of Action)*,<sup>47</sup> etc., most of which were written in Bengali. These pamphlets called on

the people to "resist the imperialist war", "move forward in the national struggle", "fight for freedom", "march forward towards political strikes", "turn the anti-war struggle into a struggle for complete independence", and "arrange for revolution in India". These pamphlets also incited the workers and peasants to fight for the realization of their own economic demands and appealed to the workers to organize strikes on both economic and political demands.

The Bengal Government was quick to react. In February 1940 the Bengal Government passed many ordinances in order to trample the working-class struggles and externed the top-ranking communist leaders like Muzaffar Ahmad, Somnath Lahiri, Bhowani Sen, Panchugopal Bhaduri and others, and many working-class communist leaders from Calcutta and its surrounding industrial areas. Ranen Sen and other communist leaders were also ordered to leave Calcutta within 1 May. P. C. Joshi, who was then in Calcutta, was also externed in February. Muzaffar Ahmed and Somnath Lahiri violated the externment order and were arrested. They were once again externed after their release. The communist leaders like Abdul Halim, Ranen Sen, Nripen Charkabarty, Panchugopal Bhaduri, etc., were also arrested. A Bengal-wide round-up of communists was made. The party press was gagged. All the party publications were proscribed. The party members and sympathizers were often harassed and intimidated. The communists had to go underground to carry on their activities. The Bengal Government, sarcastically called the "Ordinance Raj", earned a new abusive epithet from the communist press—*The Tsar's New Blood-Brothers in Bengal*.

#### *The Working-Class and Student Struggles in Calcutta*

Although no working-class strike was organized in Calcutta on purely political demands, as might be called protest strikes against the war, following the Bombay path, the working-class resorted to many militant struggles and strikes in Calcutta during 1939-1941 for realizing their own economic demands. Some of these strikes were organized by the C. P. I. members themselves, and the communists enthusiastically participated in all these strikes even when they were not organized by them. Actually the communists were the motive-force behind almost all these working-class struggles and strikes.

Some of the most prominent working-class struggles and strikes that took place in Calcutta during the period are the Calcutta Corporation Workers' strikes in March-April and August-September, 1940, the workers' strikes in different jute mills, the Calcutta Tramway Workers' struggle, the Calcutta Port and Dock workers' struggle, the strikes in the Hukumchand Electric Steel Company (subsequently renamed [the Bhartia Electric Steel Company), the Balmer Lorry Company, the Beruck Comens (later renamed the Hindustan Development Corporation), the Mackintosh Burn, the Joy Engineering Works, the French Motor Company, the shoe-making industry, etc.<sup>48</sup> These strikes and struggles were organized in the face of barbarous imperialist repression.

The communists also played a leading role in different students' strikes and struggles. At the call of the Bengal Provincial Students' Federation, whose General Secretary was a communist, Bishwanath Mukhopadhyay, the students of Calcutta observed the *Independence Day* on 26 January 1940, defying the prohibitory orders of the British Government and the restrictions imposed by the Congress President, Rajendra Prasad. The communist students also participated in the movement started by Subhas Bose from 2 July 1940 for the removal of the notorious Holwell Memorial, although by that time the C. P. I. had already parted company with Bose and started severely criticizing him. Still they participated because it was a real movement. The communists also organized some student strikes and struggles in November-December 1940 and in 1941.<sup>49</sup>

### *Epilogue*

During the period of the "Imperialist War" the C. P. I. made a very sincere and all-out endeavour to carry out its policy of war-resistance. It did not have the requisite strength to smash the British war-machine, but it made attempts. Naturally it had to bear the brunt of the imperialist offensive. But there was no real anti-imperialist mass struggle for the achievement of national freedom, as desired by the Communist Party. The C. P. I., although making a severe criticism of the Congress leadership, relied too heavily on the Congress, hoping that the Congress would start the real national struggle. It was obvious that the Congress, bent on making bargain and compromise, would never start any real mass anti-imperialist

struggle. At the same time the C. P. I. adopted a sectarian and almost negative attitude towards other leftist parties which were, no doubt, responsible for paying only lip-service to struggle. Thus "Give Proletarian Impress to the National Struggle" or "Armed Insurrection" remained in the stage of mere slogans.

P. C. Joshi was right when he accused the Congress led by Gandhi: "The result of your policy in this period meant that India had lost a great opportunity of striking for Indian freedom and world peace."<sup>50</sup> True, but the CPI cannot also shirk its responsibility for losing this "great opportunity".

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## **Question Hour and Zero Hour in West Bengal Legislature**

Amiya K. Chaudhuri\*

Questions and Half-an-Hour discussion are familiar devices in legislative methods and activities. West Bengal legislature is a pioneer in the innovation of another novel device, viz. the system of Mention cases. Each of these methods has particular objective to influence and sometimes create pressure upon the executive to be sensitive to the opinions of the legislature. Through questions the members seek information. If eliciting information is the only objective of questions, then written replies to the questions are sufficient to serve the purpose. Actually, the ministers feel more uncertain regarding the nature, objective and contents of the oral and short-notice questions because behind the questions there may be suggestions that things have gone wrong and administration is not in proper gear. Somewhere there are weaknesses about which even the minister—the political head of the department—is not fully aware. Before the incisive probing by legislators through cleverly-framed supplementaries the minister may fear to expose the weaknesses of the administration or he may prefer to keep silent and demand further notice from the members putting supplementaries which shows the minister's insufficient grip over the departmental activities. Therefore the question in the House is one of the most powerful bulwarks of democracy. Questions are important methods of legislative control to prevent the executive from being indifferent to the people's demand to tone up the administration. Questions in the House get wide publicity if they are properly framed by the inquiring member. It helps members to have clarifications from the government of the different aspects as to how the government has been formulating its policy, making the policy-decisions and going to implement them. Legislative questions have sufficient influence upon the ministers and a salutary impact upon the bureaucracy. The bureaucrats are made

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to be constantly aware that they are accountable to the legislature. It also acts as a channel for the ventilation of grievances. Through question as a method of control members collect information, data and extract statement from the minister (i. e. half an hour discussion resulting from question also) to initiate further debate attempting to influence and to take action by government. The manner in which the minister tackles the various aspects of the question brings into public focus the degree of responsiveness of the government to the matters of consequences.

### *Question Hour*

Question hour, as *Finer* observes,<sup>1</sup> is a part of the apparatus of the House for controlling the executive. During question hour members get opportunity to test the capabilities of ministers and probe into the activities of administrators. Much of effectiveness of a question depends upon the drafting of the original question. Upon a very skilful drafting the member widens the scope to make further inroads into the defence of the minister. As soon as a question is placed, the minister concerned becomes alert and takes guard until the question is answered to the apparent satisfaction of the questioner. But in the West Bengal Assembly it is sometimes found that the minister is evasive or ill-briefed when confronted with a barrage of supplementaries. There are instances when the minister himself admitted that he had not been properly briefed.<sup>2</sup> On another occasion, the minister was replying to supplementaries on price rise caused by the central budget. The Speaker himself intervened : "having regard to the importance of the question the members should get more clear answers from the Hon' ble Minister."<sup>3</sup> When the question is properly framed the minister is bound to give a definite reply. In short, the usefulness of the question lies in eliciting information but its intelligent use yields a variety of other purposes, i.e. exposure of abuses, opportunity to cross-examine the minister, ventilation of grievances, extraction of promises as also embarrassment of the government.

### *Question in West Bengal Assemblies*

Normally the first hour of a sitting-day is set apart as question

hour.<sup>4</sup> But this is not always so. It depends upon the Speaker and the pressure of business. The Business Advisory Committee with the Speaker as Chairman decides the issue.

A question may be put to the minister with regard to any matter falling within the jurisdiction of his department. But there are certain limitations which a member must keep in mind while framing his question. Twenty one such qualifications have been listed in the Rules of Procedure.<sup>5</sup> The procedures regarding questions in the West Bengal Assembly are adopted from those of the Indian Parliament with minor variations due to local circumstances. The effectiveness of question depends upon as to how it is used and to what purposes. Much of its effectiveness depends upon the leadership quality of members. Once in answer to a question, the Chief Minister made a statement that the government had appointed a special officer to look into the viability of a sugar mill at Beldanga, Murshidabad and if possible government would try to purchase the mill.<sup>6</sup> But ultimately the said sugar mill was not taken over, although subsequent ministries—the second United Front and the present Left Front government repeatedly assured the House to consider the matter. It is still a live issue. The promise has not been fulfilled due to various reasons, but legislators have not given up the issue. The question regarding Beldanga Mill came up regularly in the House. The Industry and Commerce Minister of the second Left Front Ministry took up the issue being pleaded by the RSP legislator of the area. The minister replied that the main constraint was money and informed the House that the Department of Finance did not okay the proposal of government's takeover of the mill.<sup>7</sup> In another question, the Health Minister assured the House that the government would revise the rate and allotment of money which was low at present for diet of each hospital patient.<sup>8</sup> In a very carefully framed supplementary by Shri Kashikanta Moitra, the Minister who initially tried to evade the question finally gave in saying that one Dr. Banerjee, an officer of the Health Directorate was in charge of a private Nursing Home receiving Rs. two lakh as financial grant by the West Bengal Government.<sup>9</sup>

As regards 'action taken' part of the question, there is a vital difference between the Lok Sabha and the state legislatures in India. While answering the question, if the minister makes any assurance

on the floor, the assurance is culled out of the proceedings for follow-up by the Government's Committee on Assurances. But in West Bengal there is no counterpart of the committee which actually can help the legislative committee on Government Assurances.

Previously, even during the 1960s, questions particularly the oral ones, were meant to be mainly a weapon in the arsenal of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly. The ruling party members would sparingly use this technique. Sometimes their questions were of an "inspired" or "planted" types.<sup>10</sup> Through them the ministers gave information to the House. In other cases the legislature party of the Congress in general and the Chief Minister in particular discouraged the ruling party members to raise questions which might embarrass the ministers.<sup>11</sup>

Table 1 shows that the members of the Assembly came to realise the potency of the questions gradually. More and more members used them for their information need and to bring into light their constituency problems and expose the lapses of the administrative departments. Since 1963 the question procedure had been relaxed. Members of the ruling party were allowed to put as many questions as possible. By replying to the questions of the ruling party members, the executive i.e. the ministers tried to inform the House of some policy decisions also—the good things done by the government for the welfare of the people.

An analysis of Table 1 shows that in 1962 there were as many as 61 starred questions and 123 unstarred questions and also there were 4 short-notice questions on urgent public interest. In comparison with subsequent years, the volume of question is definitely meagre. Most questions, particularly the starred ones and all the short-notice questions, were asked by the opposition members. More supplementaries were allowed as there used to be a few starred questions on the order paper. In 1962 the questions, particularly the supplementaries, were put only by the front benchers of the Opposition. Subsequently many of those opposition members became ministers when the United Fronts had come into power in 1967 and 1969 and, again in 1977 as the members and leaders of the Left Front. In 1969 the number of starred and unstarred questions increased considerably, although the number of questions raised in 1977 is lower than that raised in 1969. However, an interesting picture emerges from an analysis of the

TABLE-1

Number of Questions (Starred, Unstarred and Short Notice)\*  
Answered and Average per Hour Shown for some Selected Years

| Year      | Sessions | Total No.<br>of days | Total<br>Hours | Starred | Unstarred | Short<br>Notice | Total No.<br>of Questions | Average<br>per Hour<br>8/4 |
|-----------|----------|----------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| (1)       | (2)      | (3)                  | (4)            | (5)     | (6)       | (7)             | (8)                       | (9)                        |
| 1962      | 4        | 50                   | 244            | 61      | 123       | 4               | 188                       | 0.77                       |
| 1963      | 3        | 82                   | 369            | 640     | 1649      | 18              | 2307                      | 6.25                       |
| 1964      | 2        | 76                   | 350            | 896     | 1642      | 6               | 2544                      | 7.27                       |
| 1965      | 2        | 85                   | 382 h. 30 min. | 1178    | 2692      | 5               | 3875                      | 10.13                      |
| 1969-1970 | 3        | 58                   | 258            | 613     | 738       | 5               | 1358                      | 5.26                       |
| 1977      | 2        | 39                   | 214 h. 30 min. | 370     | 508       | 6               | 884                       | 4.12                       |
| 1978      | 3        | 62                   | 304 h. 45 min. | 623     | 697       | 6               | 1326                      | 4.35                       |
| 1979      | 2        | 55                   | 280 h. 2 min.  | 669     | 539       | 9               | 1217                      | 4.35                       |
| 1980      | 2        | 70                   | 323 h. 32 min. | 877     | 410       | 11              | 1298                      | 4.01                       |

Source: Compiled, WBLA Proceedings

\* Explanation: When the number of the question is marked by an asterix in the days' business papers it is called a 'starred' question. The starred questions are orally answered by the minister on the floor of the House. From the oral answers of the questions supplementary questions may follow. In case of unstarred questions, the replies are written and laid on the Library table. Short Notice questions are like starred question but get much more importance in the House but the procedure for raising short notice question is more stringent.

Table 1, as a whole. Three distinct periods, i.e. 1962-1965, 1969-1970 and 1977-1980 show completely three different pictures. During 1962-1965 there were 8914 questions—taking all the three types of question together, which had been put into a total period of 1345.5 hours. It gave an average of 5.26 questions per hour. While in the 4 years during 1977-1980 there were as many as 4725 questions in total, asked within a total period of 1122.81 hours, giving an average of 4.21. Therefore, the period 1962-1965 compares well with two subsequent periods. And even the United Front era of 1969-1970 with an average of 5.26 gives a better reading than the Left Front era of 1977-1980. The ratio derived from the table, although a bit crude, indicate a comparative picture of the three points in three distinct regimes in West Bengal.

#### *Oral Questions and Supplementaries*

The list of starred questions as per rules in West Bengal should not exceed 20, but it is rare that more than 6 to 10 questions are answered because of a large volume of supplementaries. As regards allowing the supplementaries, the Speaker's role has always been decisive. On an average the minister had to answer eight to ten supplementaries within the stipulated hour. Once the Minister-in-charge of the Food Department had to answer 24 supplementary questions.<sup>13</sup> West Bengal, in those days, had to suffer from massive shortage of food grains. Sometimes the Speaker even allowed one particular member to ask as many as 9 supplementaries out of a total of 17 supplementaries put by other members on the original starred question.<sup>16</sup> On another occasion, the Speaker allowed 23 supplementaries on the original question on price rise in the state allegedly due to the indirect tax increase in central budget.<sup>14</sup> Occasionally innocuous questions would reveal political overtone when broken into supplementaries. On the subject of appointment of primary school teachers in Howrah district<sup>15</sup> twenty-seven (27) supplementaries were allowed. In course of his reply, the Minister-in-charge of Education told the House that an inquiry was instituted to ascertain whether during the period between the two United Front Governments in 1967 and 1969, primary teachers mainly sponsored by the

Congress Party were appointed by the District School Board violating the norms set by the Director of Public Instruction.<sup>16</sup> In another question on the corruption charges against the gazetted officers,<sup>17</sup> the Deputy Chief Minister Shri Jyoti Basu told the House that from 1965 to December 1968 charges of corruption were brought against 1008 officers. Enquiry in respect of 555 officers was completed. Action against 139 was taken. Only one officer was punished being indicted by the Court. Even unscheduled debate for a short duration was once allowed at the conclusion of 16 supplementaries on the subject of *gherao*. The questioner himself supplied the information of 300 gheraos from March to June 1969 which triggered off acrimonious exchanges.<sup>18</sup> The question might have been the subject matter of an half-an-hour discussion, but that the questioner was more interested in the political contents of the subject-matter and the minister likewise countered the charge with the same weapon.<sup>19</sup> Political overtone was even more pronounced in the supplementaries on the oral questions. The members of the opposition were always to find fault with the present ministries and administrative departments and tried to unearth the abuses of power while the ministers in reaction used to dig at the corruption and nepotism of the previous regime in replying to the supplementaries.

21. Once, during a question hour, the Judicial Minister referred to the derequisition of a flat by the Official Receiver of the High Court to accommodate Mr. Abdus Sattar—a former Congress Minister. The procedure according to the minister was quite unusual.<sup>20</sup> In reply to a question and its supplementaries, the minister told a ruling party member of the CPI(M) that the former Congress ministry headed by Shri Siddhartha Sankar Ray had spent over 5 lakh rupees to set up stalls during the All India Congress Conference in Gauhati which was simply wastage of public money.<sup>21</sup> In a supplementary to another question, a RSP member wanted to know on whose authority the previous government had spent a huge sum of money for Mr. Sanjay Gandhi whose only *locus standi* was that he was the son of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the former Prime Minister.<sup>22</sup> In another reply to a question by a CPM member, the Finance Minister told the House that the government had spent Rs. 62.18 lakh on salary, allowances, travel, etc. of the members of the previous Cabinet between 1972 and



for government action. Some of the legislators kept their eyes fixed on publicity only. Sometimes some administrative lapses were brought to light. But it is difficult to characterise each of the three regimes very differently on the basis of nature and political contents of questions. Or, in other words, politics rather than concern for unearthing genuine administrative abuses through questions often dominated the proceedings. As for example, the question on food was amply utilized by the leftist opposition during the Congress regime in 1962. The very same problem was highlighted during the United Front regime when the leftist opposition parties of the previous era were in power in 1969. Besides, during the United Front regime the questions on law and order, *gheraos*, strikes and lock-outs dominated the question hour. The Left Front era of 1977 was seized with the questions of "emergency" excesses, enquiry commission, squandering away of public money by Congress ministers and so on. But, whatever the nature of the question might be, the departmental officers were always busy to collect the data and tried to brief the ministers as far as possible.<sup>26</sup>

The question hour, thus, occupies an important part of the business of the House. The members seemed to have a feeling that they had a duty to voice constituency demands and to stand up as spokesmen of common interests and also as scrutinisers of administrative actions. Under an efficient, matter-of-fact minister responding to a parliamentary question, the drafting of the reply is an agonizing experience on the part of the officers. The minister's anxiety to give a satisfactory reply is reflected in the working of the department headed by him. This situation brings the minister much closer to his departmental officers who have to carefully brief the minister and keep things in readiness to face up to the legislature. Legislative control in the context means the power of the members to exert influence, to put pressure upon the minister to search for information from the departments and also to make the minister pull up his departmental officers for taking action for public interest. But in this regard the personality of the minister counted a lot over the years in West Bengal.

#### *Half-an-Hour Discussion*

Half-an-Hour Discussion procedure is an extension of the question hour. It is held at the end of the Zero Hour and before the start of

the government business of the day. The private member gets an extra amount of time in extracting an elucidation of the points arising out of the replies of the minister to a question, oral or written. The member may feel that his question is not correctly or sufficiently answered. In that case he approaches the Speaker. If the Speaker is convinced and finds that further clarification is necessary in public interest, he allows the notice and arranges for discussion. The minister concerned is accordingly informed. The discussion can be held on the day when the minister is ready with all the relevant facts collected by his department. The discussion is held for half an hour on the scheduled day. The minister elucidates his earlier points on matters of facts only.<sup>27</sup> The member is further allowed to put one or two supplementary questions on the statement made by the minister. Other members are also allowed to speak strictly within the scheduled half-an-hour. It is exactly like the daily half-an-hour adjournment motion,<sup>28</sup> moved in the British House of Commons. In state legislatures in India where it is used, it appears to be a compromise between the British daily adjournment and the Indian half-an-hour. It is exactly like the daily half-an-hour method. It is a means for the members to go deep into the core of the information tearing off the maize of irrelevancies provided by the resisting bureaucracy and influence the minister as far as possible to take action against the bungling of the department.

#### *Half-an-Hour Method in West Bengal Assembly*

In West Bengal Assembly the member asking for an half-an-hour discussion is to specify shortly the point or points that he likes to raise and to state the reasons for raising discussion on the matter. The notice of the member must also be supported by the signatures of at least two other members.<sup>29</sup> The Speaker, if he thinks that the notice does not seek complete reversal of governmental policy, accepts the notice. To initiate the discussion no formal motion is moved nor is there any voting at the end of the discussion.<sup>30</sup>

Since 1962 till the closing years of the first Left Front era only 9 notices of half-an-hour discussion have been allowed by the Speaker. The discussions were held in the context of recent questions and involved sufficient public interest. Chronologically, the subject

matters of discussion were : dismissal of workers by M/s. Alkali & Chemical Corporation of India Ltd.,<sup>31</sup> prisoners under Defence of India Rules,<sup>32</sup> increase in tramfare in Calcutta,<sup>33</sup> eviction of slum dwellers at Muraripukur Road,<sup>34</sup> financial aid to different Zilla Parishads for construction of roads and bridges affected by floods,<sup>35</sup> and categories of political sufferers and their pensions.<sup>36</sup> The last two half-an-hour discussions were held on the same day in 1972. It was something rare that two half-an-hour discussions were slated for the same day. But of course it depends upon the Speaker and the readiness of the government to confront them.

- During the three critical periods of time ( Congress, United Front and Left Front ) except in 1969, there were no half-an-hour discussions. In 1969 a member of the Assembly, Mr. Abdul Latif, on the basis of his starred question,<sup>37</sup> replied by the minister on the floor, gave a notice for half-an-hour discussion. The subject-matter was of sufficient public interest. It evoked interest among all the members cutting across party lines in the House. A businessman Mr. Goenka in the process of constructing a jute mill, encroached upon some land in the river bed of *Saraswati* where the river flows into the Ganges. The member feared that this would permanently damage the river bed obstructing the flow of water and ultimately jeopardise the irrigation system up the stream.<sup>38</sup> The member was successful to rope in the irrigation minister. He came forward with his statement saying that the construction was unauthorised and the district magistrate was instructed to take necessary action. The minister also assured the House that the government was bent on dismantling the construction. In the meantime, the legal aspect of the matter was being seriously considered.<sup>39</sup>

The system of half-an-hour discussion is a complementary weapon. It is mostly used by the members of the Opposition. Its use is few and far between, but when allowed to be raised it is a very effective weapon. It depends upon the legislator's skill to move the Speaker to allow the discussion by his sustained effort. The above example shows that if the discussion is allowed, not only the minister concerned but also his whole department along with other related administrative departments get involved in the reply.

### *The Zero-Hour*

Immediately after the question hour, the House prepares itself for the private members' business. It is a most active interlude that enlivens the entire atmosphere of the House including its press and visitor's galleries. In the newly-elected House in 1977, during zero hour, a remark by a Forward Bloc member became very interesting. Referring to the former irrigation minister, Mr. A. B. A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury who had been absent during the first few days of the current session, the member said that Mr. Khan Chowdhury could not be found in Sujapur (Mr. Khan's constituency), Calcutta and Delhi. He suggested that the Speaker should announce a reward of Rs. 10,000 to obtain his whereabouts. The Speaker Mr. Mansur Habibullah replied that the Chief Minister, who was present in the House, would do the needful. All the members, including the Chief Minister himself, burst into laughter.<sup>40</sup>

As there is no government business and it is almost a free for all session, the period is conventionally indicated as Zero Hour. In Indian Parliament the Speaker allows only one hour from 12 noon to 1 p. m. for the purpose. But in West Bengal it is often found that the Speaker allows the session to roll on more than an hour. It is the hour when members of the Opposition attempt to bring adjournment motion. A spate of Calling Attention Notices is scheduled, followed by the mention cases. As soon as the notices of adjournment motions are simply read out and the Calling Attention Notices are disposed of, the whole House becomes lively with each member trying frantically to catch the eye of the chair. *The significance of the term zero-hour is best revealed during this mention hour.*

### *Mention Cases in the House*

The members of the House acting as links between the people and the government must have the opportunity to bring certain constituency-oriented personal issues to the notice of the House. The members are often seen playing to the galleries and attracting attention of the press across the chamber to speak to the people at large and to their constituencies in particular. The representatives do not

find enough time to present a case which in their perception are urgent and immediate. The period fixed for the mention cases provides a unique opportunity for them to persuade the executive without much legislative formalities. The members come ready with immediate constituency problems or something of general problems to attract a favourable attention of the minister.

The first two hours of the House, from the beginning of the question hour to the end of the zero hour, are always under a glare of publicity. The House during this period is also packed with representatives "who have something to say and are waiting with consuming impatience for a chance to say it, hoping against hope that the chance will not slip from their grasp."<sup>41</sup> The observation made about the British House of Commons above is very appropriate in describing the atmosphere that prevails during the mention period in West Bengal Legislature.

The mention notices are to be given to the Secretary of the Assembly for the Speaker's permission at least half-an-hour before commencement of the sitting.<sup>42</sup> But it is often seen that the Speaker is giving permission to the member when he moves to the Speaker's podium with a written notice and seeking his permission very politely but with urgency.

#### *An Innovation in West Bengal Assembly*

An outside observer, sitting in the gallery in the midst of numerous mention cases on various issues, sometimes frivolous but often serious, may have a fine glimpse of the state of things—socio-political, economic, cultural, administrative or even personal that are happening outside. The period truly reflects the political mood of the state at a particular point of time. It is a period for free expression of opinions. Sometimes the executive also responds to a short discussion reflecting the true spirit of democracy. Often during this time, there is no secrecy because if government always operates in secrecy there can be no parliamentary control and no proper judgement by the people.<sup>43</sup> But this sort of interruption of the House by means of putting mention cases based on reported incidents of all sorts of individual grievances is not to be found in the British Parliament or in the Parliaments of Canada, New Zealand and other West European

countries. There are reasons for it. In Britain, there is an institution of Parliamentary Commissioner of Administration. In West European countries and New Zealand this institution is called the Ombudsman. Citizens' grievances are sent to the Ombudsman appointed by the government. There is no comparable provision in India. In this respect, regular introduction of the mention cases in West Bengal and allowing special mention cases in Indian Parliament are unique homegrown devices.

2. In the absence of the Lokayuktas, i.e. ombudsman-like official at the state level that can be found in some of the Indian states like Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, etc., the members, when they feel it urgent, directly raise the matters causing public and particular grievances of the constituencies on the floor of the House. This is an instant way of bringing the matter to the notice of the minister. If the matter is serious enough the minister promises that he would look into the matter. Seriousness and persuasion on the part of the members concerning real grievances often impel the executive to respond.

Introduction of mention cases is of recent origin. Prior to the introduction of this procedure in the seventies on a regular basis,<sup>44</sup> there was no other means available to the private members for raising an important issue focusing on the constituency or other immediate problems. Though mention cases, as points of information in very restricted manner, have been continuing since 1957, yet not until the middle of 1970s, the practice found its place in the list of business. The immediate reason for allowing the members to raise such problems in the House is to prevent them from being frustrated and obstructive. The member wishing to raise an issue is required by rule to give a notice to the Secretary of the Assembly. With the permission of the Speaker, the member through this procedure gets an opportunity of raising various matters concerning his constituency at the earliest. While raising such a point in the House, it is not permissible for a member to deviate from or add to what he has already started in his written notice. But the Speaker in the West Bengal Assembly has never been very rigid in his insistence on obtaining prior permission.<sup>45</sup> When this procedure was not incorporated in the Rules of Procedure, the Speaker Shri Keshab Chandra Bose once said to a member that he should have taken prior permission before

raising anything on the floor of the House. However he gave him some time to raise the issue, as a special case.<sup>46</sup> Mention cases between 1962 and 1965 were few and far between. Since the beginning of the first United Front, the members attempted to bring to the notice of the House, certain immediate issues which were of instant news value. This was true of 1965 and 1966 also. In the later years, particularly during the second United Front regime, mention cases, yet to be incorporated into the Rules, found almost regular place in the proceedings. Table—2 gives an idea of the volume of mention cases that were brought before the House by the members. The table is illustrative only.

**Table—2**  
**Number of Mention Cases for Some Selected Years :**  
**Average Shown ( Per Hour )**

| Year<br>(1) | Sessions<br>(2) | Days<br>(3) | Hours<br>(4)  | Nos. of<br>Cases<br>(5) | Average<br>Per Hour<br>(6) |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1962        | 4               | 50          | 244           | Nil                     | —                          |
| 1969-1970   | 3               | 58          | 258           | 510                     | 1.98                       |
| 1977        | 2               | 39          | 214h. 30 min. | 350                     | 1.63                       |
| 1978        | 3               | 62          | 340h. 45 min. | 653                     | 2.14                       |
| 1979        | 2               | 55          | 280h. 2 min.  | 568                     | 2.02                       |
| 1980        | 2               | 70          | 323h. 32 min. | 522                     | 1.61                       |

Source : WBLA Proceedings.

In 1962, there were no regular mention cases in the House. Members sometimes were allowed to raise a few matters on a point of information. In 1969-70 the total number of mention cases rose to 510 the average per hour being 1.98. The Speaker did not allow mention cases on all the days and tried to restrict the number. But later on, as soon as the procedure became a regular feature, the members began to use it indiscriminately. The averages per hour were 1.63 in 1977, 2.14 in 1978, 2.02 in 1979 and 1.61 in 1980.

This ultimately led the House to restrict the number of mention cases to six only for which 24 minutes were allowed. But the Speaker again became liberal and allowed 10 to 12 mention cases a day.<sup>47</sup> Subsequently, it has been found that even 25 to 30 mention cases were allowed.

All sorts of subjects came up in the mention cases, such as rise in the price of rice, party clashes between the CPI and CPI(M),<sup>48</sup> insufficiency of irrigation in rural areas, floods in North Bengal, problems of refugees, lockout in mills, press-strike, officer disregarding the certificates issued by the MLAs.<sup>49</sup> In a mention, a member (Shri Bibhuti Pahari) once requested the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs to increase the time of the question hour to which the Minister Shri Jatin Chakraborty replied that it might be considered by the Business Advisory Committee only. Sharp came a retort from a Congress member Shri Bijay Singh Nahar pointing out that even the Business Advisory Committee could not change the rules.<sup>50</sup> Subject-matters had been almost the same in the different Assemblies. They differed only in the degree of emphasis interspersed with political over-tone borne out by the nature of the regime.

Sometimes it is found that during mention, members attempt to raise privilege motion.<sup>51</sup> Surprisingly Shri Nathaniel Murmu, the RSP member, was found raising a privilege motion against the Higher Education Minister regarding irregular appointment of a former Inspector-General of Police Shri Ranjit Gupta as a research guide in the Department of Anthropology in the Calcutta University. The Deputy Speaker assured the House to extract clarification from the minister.<sup>52</sup> This privilege motion was simply treated as a mention case. Later on the minister clarified his earlier statement. Allegations and counter-allegations also feature in some of the mention cases. During the mention hour a member, Shri Dilip Majumdar of CPI(M) alleged that a young man had been beaten to death by some "Congress goondas" (ruffians) in Durgapur. Thereafter in another mention a Congress leader, Shri Zainal Abedin read out a telegram that a man had been killed by "goondas" led by a local CPI(M) leader in Burdwan.<sup>53</sup>

During mention period, it is not mandatory on the part of minister concerned to be present in the House. Neither is he bound to respond and reply to the points raised. But it is often found that the minister



responds to a pertinent point involving lapses of his department. Occasionally the minister asks the member raising the issue to give him the details in writing.<sup>54</sup> It is the usual practice that the section of the legislative secretariat dealing with mention cases takes down the substantive cases from the day's proceedings. Thereafter it processes the matters and with a forwarding memorandum sends them to the concerned departments of the government. Usually the departmental minister, after consulting his officials, sends back a reply, saying that "the concerned department is seized with the problem" or "action has been taken" or "the matter is being considered". The member received the reply of the minister through the legislative secretariat, although the legislative secretariat does not get a separate copy of the reply. As a result, nothing is recorded on the proceedings and 'action taken report' is not maintained. This is a serious procedural drawback. If mention case procedure is to complement other techniques like questions, supplementaries and calling attention motions, etc. for the redressal of people's grievances through the process of influencing the executive, dealing with mention cases by the legislative secretariat should be more purposive. It requires the strengthening of the legislative support structure. It calls for special attention of the Speaker and his direction to the legislative staff to properly record the cases and pursue the government department to respond as early as possible.

The back-benchers of the ruling party have little opportunity to be heard in the House. The opposition members other than the leaders can raise any issue through adjournment motion or by carefully framing supplementaries and oral or written questions. These methods are not available to the ruling party members even if they feel aggrieved at some administrative lapses. They may have some genuine constituency problems for which calling attention is not enough. To cope with this, mention case technique of legislative control has been adopted in West Bengal. The mention case technique though availed of by the members belonging to both sides of the House, is substantively much important to the members of the ruling side. The members of the Opposition use the technique mostly for its publicity value. The ruling party back-benchers sometimes approach the minister to influence him to solve the problem. But

they also require some sort of method that will give them larger audience. Mention case is one of such methods available to them.

### *Mention Cases and Questions*

Question is a very effective method to directly control the bureaucracy ( because it is accountable to the legislature ) and to test the efficiency of the minister and the sense of his responsibility. But all this depends upon the parliamentary skill of the members framing the questions and their supplementaries. Mention on the other hand is an instant technique. It is a ready method for the members. A point to be seriously noted is that the member may be prone to over-exercise the mention technique. Like framing a question, the mention technique does not require very much skill and patience on the part of the members. The members are to overcome this tendency. With a correct sense of timing and with proper understanding of the issue, a member can create sensation in the House during the mention hour of the House. The news-reporters are all there to make a story in the next day's newspaper.

The government department concerned cannot be oblivious of the fact that through a mention in the House, departmental negligence or act of omissions and commissions may be exposed. A series of quickly-framed, well-contrived supplementaries or an issue raised through mention procedure may act as a deterrent or sometimes a sobering influence on the executive, both political and the permanent.

The members belonging to the treasury-bench can put questions and supplementaries. But there is limit beyond which he cannot travel to embarrass the minister. And even in case of extreme dissatisfaction he cannot put an adjournment motion. The mention procedure under the circumstances is a handy weapon with which he can beat the department without embarrassing his minister on the floor. If members belonging to both sides of the House can exercise proper discretion in choosing between issues and non-issues, the mention case method, like question hour in the House, will have the desired impact upon the executive. The method is in activating the ministers and motivating the officers. Participation may influence the executive that may have an impact upon decision-making.

### *Conclusion*

Now-a-days some of the legislative methods are not very much in use. The half-an-hour discussion arising out of a question is one of them. Sometimes the members complain that the Speaker is not allowing proper elucidation of the points through supplementaries or the minister is trying to evade the most important point of the question. But the proceeding during the last few Assemblies show that they are hardly taking pains to raise the issue through proper notices of half-an-hour discussion. They often resort to short-cuts. They try to raise all sorts of issues through mentions in the House. Procedurally mention technique cannot be as effective as desired. In this connection a former minister Shri Kashi Kanta Moitra opines that now-a-days professionalism in politics is increasing but paradoxically legislative professionalism is in decline in West Bengal.<sup>56</sup> Unless this imbalance is removed legislative control cannot be as effective to the extent desired. As a result the members are often to run after the minister within and outside the House and even the officers outside the House to get things done. However Shri Moitra like some other ministers admitted that legislative control or influence, more or less, had been there through these micro methods.

As an agent like an Ombudsman, legislators receive representations from the people and thereafter ventilates their grievances. At the same time they are conscious of, and keen on, the publicity value of their activities on the floor of the House and its impact on the executive. Here legislative control cannot be direct. It is indirect, imperceptible though not insignificant. Most of the ministers and the officers admitted that members through question method have played significant role in West Bengal Assembly in eliciting many a vital information and ventilating grievances and thus have influence over the executive to some extent. Informally the control in this sense can be described as representational and ombudsmantic.<sup>57</sup> The vigilant legislator is always to be ready to play the role of overseeing the administration. Ministers are always to be ready and adept, as far as their capability permits, to answer the criticism and counter the charges with facts and figures brought about on the floor by the members of the Opposition. Ministers are also to gauge the

feelings of the members belonging both to the ruling party or front and the opposition. It is often found that ministers are discussing with the members on some constructive and vital points raised by the members of his own party. Sometimes it is also found that the Chief Whip of the government party or the coalition is trying to accommodate, at least, some minor points of the Opposition or assuage their wounded vanity. Through this mechanism of 'Whip in Consultation'<sup>58</sup> the executive indirectly seeks some direction and has to be susceptible to the influence exercised by the members both individually and collectively.

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## Religion and Politics : Tension or Intégration ?

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We generally concede the holistic approach to the understanding of human nature. The individual is an integrated whole having various aspects—sociological, religious, economic, political, psychological, ethnological, etc. We do not envisage these dimensions as insulated water-tight compartments. The total man cannot be sundered. History however is studded with examples reflecting a tension between the religious and the political dimensions of human enterprise. Religions have served as divisive forces in society, and 'holy wars' fought in their name have caused much bloodshed and political fragmentation. Recently gory violence at Ayodhya in the name of religion has mobilised dangerous political trends. Such anomalous incidents rekindle the important question of the relation between religion and politics. Is it *essentially* one of tension or is the tension circumstantial only ? It is proposed to discuss this question with special reference to the Indian context.

For the average Indian, religion is a way of life. Good sense, benevolence, self-control, active charity, and honesty are among the basic teachings of Hinduism. We are religious insofar as we practise these virtues. Hinduism (the most popular religion in India) teaches that it is possible to achieve union with the divine power. It stresses the intrinsic vitality of an elevated inner life and of an enhanced sense of ethical and spiritual values. The ethical element is of fundamental importance in determining the quality of a religion. It greatly enriches the religious life of the devotee. The official religion which men share simply as citizens of a state, a concern with external observances like rites, ceremonies, worship of a plurality of gods, and the support of the caste system neither satisfies the personal religious needs of human being, nor reflects what our religion intrinsically is. The Hindu devotee cleanses, offers food to, and worships, an idol, but these external rituals are not ends in themselves. The devotee tries

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to inculcate all the lofty virtues with which he invests his God. The idolatry of the Hindu is merely an incidental means serving a deeper end, namely, concentration on the exalted idea of God, and a conscious emulation of a particular body of ethical and social rules of conduct. Ramayanism for instance is not empty worship of an idol, it is a way of life incorporating the virtues of humanism, valiance, elder-assentation, etc. A proper understanding of the essence of our religion, and a careful separating of it from the external, superficial features of our religion, is necessary if a successful alliance is to be effected between religion and politics. The relation is congenial when we honestly try to approximate religious values and norms like humanism, non-violence, righteousness, etc. in our political activity. Human welfare, peaceful development and social progress are characteristic of a society in which our political practice concurs with our religious teachings, for, the latter is seldom anti-humane, or pro-destruction, or pro-malpractice. Clearly, there is no intrinsic conflict between religion and politics. In fact, wonderful results could accrue from a genuine convergence—our political activity could get recharged with a humanistic content and intent.

Another aspect of the vital relation between religion and politics is revealed in the values imbibed in our Constitution which clearly reflect our religion. The pledge of secularism which forms a significant part of our Constitution is inspired by our fundamental religious values. A survey of the whole field of Hinduism brings to light certain fundamental theological convictions, which in themselves are secular in nature. The Law of Karma, which is widely conceded, contains the idea that the deeds (*karma*) done by an individual determine his position possibly in the present existence, but certainly in his future life or lives. To this idea is related the concepts of sin (*papa*), merit (*punya*) and salvation (*moksha*). Belief in reincarnation and in the eternity of the soul is nearly universal among the Hindus. Hinduism is thus catholic and secular in its appeal for its basic concerns, namely, the notions of the immortality of the soul, merit, sin, salvation, etc. are not tainted by any sectarian bias. They cut across all religions being relevant to any follower of any religion. Secularization as a rational civil process of the modern polity is inspired by deep-rooted religious values of which a non-denomina-



tional concern for the good of the present and next life, and for social well-being is primary. Our religious values and perspectives illuminate and clarify the Constitutional objective of secularization. We can practise secularism in its true spirit, that is, apart from cold non-committal tolerance of each other's faith, we can cultivate positive love and achieve unity through diffusion of our essential humanistic religious values. Thus a genuine extension of our religion into politico-civil affairs could bestow enduring solidarity at the collective level.

If, however, for short-term gains, self-seeking politicians 'politicize' religion in a pejorative sense, stressing the contingent, external features of our religion (for example, idol worship, erection of commemorative monuments, etc.) then it is possible to distort our essential religious values and engage in fiercely competitive, derogatory a-religious political activity. Here practice is at variance with the essence of our religious teachings. Unscrupulous politicians often incite religious sects against one another by deliberately emphasizing the differences of the extrinsic aspects of their religion. In the name of establishing their secular rights these different religious sects then engage in mutual strife redolent of gross religious intolerance, thereby creating nothing but a delusion of secularism; for secularism also means greater respect for each other's faith. This is precisely what has transpired in Ayodhya. Muslims (who condemn idolatry) and Hindus (for whom idolatry does not form the *essence* of religion) have been instigated into a hysteria over a place of worship, by politicians motivated by communal vote-politics. But, in fact, the sustenance of the mosque or the building of a Ram temple would make no functional difference to the religiosity of either the Hindu or the Muslim devotee. For, the pulse of religion does not lie in such extraneous factors. Politicians with the intention of political gains disparage the fundamental values and ideology of our religion, divesting political processes of their true religious affiliations, thereby creating religio-political havocs. What is to be stressed is that religion and politics are not integrally at loggerheads; the tension between them is circumstantial created by a misrepresented admixing of the two.

30 We have been trying to comprehend the vital aspects of the relationship that obtains between religion and politics, with an

emphasis on religion, because the religiosity of the moderate Indian forms the essential texture of his being. The religion of man cannot be understood wrenched from his socio-political context. An insight into our religion is not possible without an understanding of the socio-political context in which it is embedded. We must identify and determine the wider context that gave rise to the origin, development and modification of our religion. In the 11th century India experienced the first Muslim invasion. By the 14th century Muslim rulers established considerable sway over the northern, central and southern parts of India. The attractiveness of Islam lay in its condemnation of idolatry and its pure monotheism. These had their effects on Hinduism in various ways, successful conversions being one of them. Another impact was envisaged in the preaching of Kabir and Nanak commending a synthesis between Hindu and Muslim values. We should endeavour to enrich our faith and religion by constructively trying to find out how and to what extent foreign cultures and religions have intricately entered into and influenced our history, religion and culture. Thus, the Babri mosque which is now a bone of contention is nevertheless a part and parcel of our history and in fact we should preserve it as bearing evidence of the layers of history that our nation has evolved through, and of the steadfastness of our religion which has stood its ground in the face of invasion and persecution. To delve into the past and achieve the original status quo defacing the saga of our historical evolution would in fact be a retrograde step. Our political evolution to a large extent influences and modifies our religion and is an acid-test of our religious forbearance. We rediscover the significance of our religion as we pass through different political phases.

On the other hand, religion in India has played a major and indispensable role in political movements. The following examples could be cited in this context. In the thirties the Muslim League first began to press its demand for an independent Muslim state to be called Pakistan. It found an astute leader in M.A. Jinnah, an ex-Congress leader who succeeded in founding Pakistan. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad, another religious organization, has as its aim the promotion of Hindu culture and Hindu *Rashtra*. It claims to be trying to re-establish the integrity of India through constitutional

means. Sikh politics is closely connected with the control of the gurdwaras. Again, the politics of the former Travancore State was marked by keen rivalry between the Syrian Christians and the Hindus.

The most prominent example of linking religion with politics is found in Gandhiji's leadership. The definition of religion in terms of moral philosophy or universal spiritual ideals provided the theoretical foundation for mass politicization. Gandhiji effectively used 'satyagraha' (literally, holding fast to truth) as a political manoeuvring strategy which however had its genesis in his profound religious and ethical beliefs. Behind Gandhiji's public acts (long fasts, tedious marches, etc.) lay the Hindu notion of the ascetic who by the power of his austerities (*tapas*) could bring about changes in his environment. His political activities, spanned with his deeper religious values, delivered an unprecedented jolt to the British Raj.

Clearly, religion and politics are not essentially at cross-purposes. In fact, they complement each other, serving as each other's context. Devaluation of the relation is due to distortion of intrinsic religious values for egotistic political pursuits. We have only to blame ourselves for defilement of the relation. If the relation were wielded in an honest, wholesome vigour, much good could ensue. The above proposition could be neatly summarised in Jawaharlal Nehru's words: "The spiritualization of politics; using the words not in its narrow religious sense, seemed to me a fine idea. A worthy end should have worthy means leading up to it". (*Toward Freedom*)

## **The Jharkhand Movement In Orissa**

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and

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Of late, the Jharkhand movement has engaged the attention of scholars and men of affairs alike. Originally ethnic in nature, the movement has undergone a steady process of politicization in the direction of developing a powerful sub-nationalist bias. It became politically significant in the late thirties and gathered momentum in an alliance with regional and parochial forces that emerged in India on the eve of Independence. Despite the fact that the movement in the past failed to achieve its political goal of a separate Jharkhand State within the Union of India, it left a formidable legacy in the Jharkhand Party which had a remarkable electoral success at least in two States in the first decade of independence. The party played a significant role in Bihar and in Orissa before factions and feuds gripped the party organization, and it merged with the Congress. That was, however, not the end of the movement. It was kept alive through the programmes pursued by a variety of organizations at different levels, though, politically the movement appeared dormant for some time. The recent upsurge of the mass-based struggles has once again reopened the question necessitating a deep probe into the whole range of conflicts that the movement embraces.

The movement has been studied by sociologists in three phases viz. (i) the formulatory phase, (ii) the constructive phase, and (iii) the elaborate phase of political movement<sup>1</sup>. Recently it may be said to have entered into two new phases viz. (i) the phase of consolidation

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and (ii) the phase of militant agitations which needs to be studied closely.

Here the Jharkhand movement in Orissa is studied in a nutshell.

Out of the six tribal culture zones, the tribes of Orissa come under two zones such as (i) the Chotanagpur Plateau and its extension and (ii)

the Eastern Ghats ranges, Dandakaranya and the Chhatisgarh region.

Three districts, situated in the northern part of Orissa, namely, Sundargarh, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj come under the former, while the latter includes the districts of Kalahandi, Phulbani and Koraput.

All the northern districts have been carved out of the four princely States such as Bonai, Gangpur, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj. The other tribal region which lies in the southern part of Orissa includes the former native States of Kalahandi, Baud, Phulbani and a large part of the erstwhile Jeypore Zamindari which is situated in Koraput district.

The Jharkhand movement has affected the northern part of the State of Orissa which is mostly inhabited by the tribes such as the Munda, Bhuiyan, Kisan, Oraon, Bhumij, Ho etc., which are known as the Kolarian tribes and differ from the Dravidian tribes of southern Orissa. Spread of Christianity has made a significant headway in the region particularly in Sundargarh (16.55%) and Keonjhar (14.02%) districts. While a part of the region is remarkably urbanised (23.3%) in Sundargarh district, urbanization is moderate in Keonjhar (7.00%) and it is at its lowest in Mayurbhanj (2.8%). The number of Oriya speakers is significantly less in this part of Orissa (56.97% in Sundargarh, 56.89% in Mayurbhanj and 80.05 % in Keonjhar). On the other hand, the speakers of tribal languages are significant in number who speak a dialect from the Mundari group of languages.

The emergence of Munda leadership was noticed in Orissa as early as April 1939 soon after the Adivasi Mahasabha was formed. In that year the princely State of Gangpur was severely affected by drought for which the tribals under the leadership of Kirmal Munda launched an agitation demanding exemption from payment of land revenue. This led to the Simko firing on 25 April 1939 when a public meeting was in progress under the chairmanship of Nirmal Munda. In the firing, as reported by eye-witnesses, as many as 41 persons were killed.<sup>a</sup>

The former ruling chiefs of Orissa, though most of them claimed Kshatriya origin, maintained a sort of agnatic relationship with the tribes of their respective States from a long time as a result of which the tribes had developed a natural reverence for the princes. With the coming of independence, the ruling princes of the Orissa States led a political movement in a bid to maintain their former influence somewhat unchanged in the new set-up. They made valiant efforts to constitute a union of states called the Eastern States Union and to prevent their respective territories from merging with the British province. Thus, within the princely States of Orissa two dominant political movements were going on simultaneously viz. the Jharkhand movement of the tribes in the States of Bonai, Gangpur, Bamra, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj, and the unionist movement of the princes in which the ruling chiefs of western Orissa were deeply involved. The motive behind both the movements was to oppose the scheme of building new centres of political power by the Congress. Thus a connivance worked between both the tribes and the princes in resisting the Congress dominance.

In Nilgiri, a small princely state in the north-west border of the then Balasore district, the connivance between the ruling chief and the aborigines resulted in an explosive situation. With a view to curbing the activities of the Praja Mandal, which demanded a responsible government in the state forthwith, the ruling chief sponsored a party of his own which mostly consisted of the tribals. Armed with their traditional weapon, bow and arrow, they looted and burnt the houses of the prominent Praja Mandal leaders. When the situation deteriorated further, arson and looting were carried on indiscriminately resulting in chaos and anarchy which led the provincial government to take over the administration of the state on 4 November 1947. Nothing is known definitely as to what extent the tribals of Nilgiri were influenced by the Jharkhandis who still include this portion of Orissa in their proposed Jharkhand State.

The twin processes of integration and democratization of the Indian States had its "humble beginnings" in Orissa. Twenty-five out of the twenty-six States merged with the Orissa province on 1 January 1948. About this time, the Jharkhand leaders approached the Prime Minister of Orissa for the inclusion of the Chhotanagpur Plateau in the

province<sup>4</sup>. When the proposal was rejected by the then Government of Orissa, the Jharkhand leaders wanted to include in Bihar as many as 12 princely states of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh with a view to maintaining the administrative integrity of Jharkhand that would have facilitated the formation of a separate Jharkhand State subsequently. In Kharswan a violent tribal uprising, sponsored by the supporters of the Jharkhand movement, raised its head against the merger of the State with Orissa. A meeting was convened by them at the market place which was attended by the tribals numbering about 35,000 who came from Jamshehpur, Ranchi, Santhal Parganas, Mayurbhanj, Rajgangpur and other neighbouring places of the region.<sup>5</sup> In the morning they marched in procession through the main thoroughfares of Kharswan. Then they had a meeting with the ruling chief who is reported to have received them cordially. Their agitation was of such magnitude that the officers sent by the Government of Orissa to take over the charge of the State administration had to come back after passing through a lot of humiliation at the hands of the agitating tribals<sup>6</sup>. In the firing opened by the police to check lawlessness about 1000 persons were killed according to the statement of the Jharkhand leaders, while the Government sources recorded only 14 deaths. The following extract needs to be perused in this context.

"Orissa authorities had staged a massacre of innocents, another Jallianwalabag. How could they hide their foul crime from the world? At dusk, the Orissa soldiers cordoned off the market place, which had been littered with dead bodies and the wounded, and they would not allow anyone to get out of the cordon nor anyone inside it to give help and succour to the wounded. They also searched the houses about the market place for the dead and wounded, so that every vestige of evidence might be thoroughly destroyed. No women were allowed to survive and many men were also hacked to death. They collected the dead bodies and carried them away in about ten lorry-loads and disposed of them; some in the inaccessible and tiger-infested part of the jungle, some were thrown into deep streams and ravines, some were buried en masse in trenches dug then and there for the purpose and others were burnt! Only about two scores were left behind in the market place. The wounded were left in the open

throughout the wintry night and their cries for water were unheeded. Oriya vandalism knew no bounds.”<sup>7</sup>

In the face of such violent agitations, the Government of India revised its decision and the two states, namely, Saraikella and Kharswan were reintegrated with Bihar in May 1948.

The State of Mayurbhanj did not merge with Orissa on 1 January, 1948 since the ruler took the plea of consulting his popularly constituted ministry. When the state acceded to Orissa a year later on 1 January 1949, the tribals who constituted about 50 per cent of the population launched a massive agitation to prevent its merger with the province. They started a movement of non-co-operation and satyagraha. They demanded that either Mayurbhanj should merge with Bihar or a plebiscite be held to ascertain the wishes of the people regarding its merger. The agitational programmes included (i) preventing the movement of consumable goods, (ii) boycotting the courts and the Oriya language, (iii) felling of reserved forests, and (iv) selling and purchasing rice and pulses etc., beyond the borders of Orissa. It is claimed that their movement continued peacefully for a month with the cooperation of the opposition parties. It took a violent turn after 4 February 1949 resulting in police firing in about eight places. The situation that has been described as a “reign of terror in Mayurbhanj State” has been narrated by two local tribal leaders :

“Since fifth instant almost all prominent leaders and workers near about fifty were arrested by Orissa military forces and their houses were raided and looted. Innocent pedestrians and men, women and children are being mercilessly assaulted, ornaments and valuables of ladies are being snatched away. On the following day at Gurnundia about three miles north-west of Rairangpur the SDO ordered the military to lathi-charge and open fire on a non-violent and unarmed gathering at 4 p.m. Eye witnesses report that over two thousand were killed and over five hundred were seriously injured. Next day, there was firing on the villagers of Dhatkidih followed by looting at many places throughout Mayurbhanj.”<sup>8</sup>

When India was celebrating the termination of the notorious internal emergency in early 1977, the tribal activists were in the prison, a fact that has a bearing on the present movement. Since



1977. Independence Day is being celebrated by them as a day of protest.

The impact of the unionist movement of the princes and the Jharkhand movement of the tribes may be noticed in the emergence of two dominant political groups among the tribes viz. the "loyalists" who supported the princes and the "separatists" who demanded a Jharkhand State for the tribes.<sup>9</sup> With the gradual weakening of the former princes, the separatists are becoming too much vocal in pursuing their demands.

Unlike the party position in the Legislative Assembly of Bihar, the Jharkhand Party failed to emerge as the main opposition in Orissa after the first General Election in 1952. It was the Ganatantra Parishad, a political party led by the princes, that functioned as the main opposition in the Orissa Assembly and the Jharkhand Party with a strength of five seats only went for an alliance with the ruling Congress, which lasted for a brief period. Thus, the forces that opposed the Congress were divided. With the active help of a few Adivasi leaders, a tribal political wing called the All-Orissa Adivasi Sabha was organised within the Congress party fold to secure the tribal support in favour of the Congress party. This, however, could hardly ward off the stiff opposition coming from the side of the former princes. After the second General Election in 1957 when the Congress party entered into a coalition with the Ganatantra Parishad, the Jharkhand party was in the opposition. About this time the central organization of the Jharkhand party faced crises that led to its merger with the Congress in Bihar.<sup>10</sup> The Orissa unit of the Jharkhand party, however, did not follow suit and continued to maintain its enfeebled political existence. A small section of the party, however, continued to fight for a separate Jharkhand State.

The activities pursued by the Jharkhand Party have imparted a growing sense of tribal identity among the tribes of Orissa aiming at restructuring of their communal life. An illustration from a tribal religion may be cited to make the point clear. In 1951, for the first time, the Census Commissioner of India reported about a new religion called SARNA which the tribes of Mayurbhanj followed. The followers of this religion numbered 1,498 in 1961 which further

increased to 87,839 in 1971 in the district.<sup>10</sup> The religion has a modest following in Keonjhar and Sundargarh.<sup>10</sup>

It is a religion that seeks to bind together a number of tribes such as the Santal, Munda, Mahale, Birhor, Ho etc. of northern Orissa. It traces the descent of the members of all these tribes to a mythical old couple known as Pilchu Budha and Pilchu Budhia. The followers of the religion worship Marang Buru as their supreme Lord. It claims that the tribes are the original settlers as well as the original rulers of their land which is the "Land of Light." The religion elevates bow and arrow to the status of the national armament of the tribes. It enjoins SIKKA (a scar in the left hand) for the men and tattoo marks on the chest running like a necklace for the women. It deplores the intrusion of the outsiders to tribal areas and asserts that the tribals are never meant for the lowly services of the outsiders. It claims them as a race of toilers, not of beggars. The religion also contains myths regarding the origins of the tribes and the origins of their important tradition.<sup>11</sup>

The multi-linguistic nature of the so-called Jharkhand tract has been a positive obstruction in the way of evolving a sense of organic unity among the tribes. The States Reorganization Commission rejected the idea of the separate State of Jharkhand mainly on the ground that the region lacks a *lingua franca*. The movement in Orissa is characterised by factions grown on the basis of language or dialect. There is a difference between the Munda leadership and the Santal leadership in forging a sense of unity among the tribes. The important tribal languages of the zone are Santhali, Sadri and Kuli. Attempts for drawing more and more minor tribes to a dominant linguistic group and demands for popularising tribal languages constitute also a part of the movement. It is Guru Gomke Raghunath Murmu (1905-1982), a Santal of Rairangpur who is credited to have invented a new script *Olchiki* for Santhali language. The script was invented in 1941 which came to light in 1962. There are some important periodicals<sup>12</sup> coming out in Santhali which has by now 73 well-known scribes. According to 1981 census, the Santhali-speaking people number about 37 lakh in the region. Linguistically minor tribal groups are merging fast with the Santhali speakers in order to develop a common tribal language for the whole region.

A number of demands for socio-economic reforms are also associated with the movement which need to be surveyed and evaluated thoroughly. A few examples may illustrate the point. The leaders want tribal teachers exclusively to be posted in their areas, a demand which is fast drawing the attention of the State government. They also vehemently criticise the existing government schemes for their development. Their allegation is: "The Government has only worked for the capitalists in Jharkhand."

Big dams and factories are of no benefits to the tribals. As mentioned elsewhere, while one part of the zone is highly urbanised and industrialised, the other part is predominantly rural, and in both the parts of the region development works have added to the suffering of the tribals. Industrialization and urbanization have robbed the local tribes of their traditional means of livelihood without providing them with adequate scope for their absorption or rehabilitation. They only get jobs of *cooli-reza*. In the rural part of the tribal belt construction of big dams has submerged lands and villages of the tribals who are facing acute problems of rehabilitation. In this context the pronouncement "they have made us refugees in our home" seems hardly exaggerated. They are also being cheated and exploited in the name of development. "In Keonjhar, there is hardly any trace of the works done in the name of tribal development", reports an eye-witness. The *Anganabadi* programmes conducted by the panchayat samitis has resulted in the exploitation of Adivasi girls. Thousands of men and women are being lured away for decent jobs which culminate in all kinds of torture.

The tribals are very much unhappy with the government rules framed relating to the forest and forest resources, which constitute a traditional source of their livelihood. They are demanding remunerative prices for the sale of Mahua flowers, Sabai grass and Kendu leaves etc. The various factions of the Jharkhand parties are busy articulating the grievances faced by the tribes.

As regards the course of the movement, new turn is in marked evidence since 1977. With the rise of a new political party, i.e. the Janata party at the national level, the tribal leaders joined hands with it with a tacit understanding that in the event of Janata party coming to power, the party would give a fresh look into the question of constitu-

tion of small states in general and the constitution of Jharkhand State in particular. But within a year of the Janata rule, they were disappointed and their smouldering discontent took the shape of an open revolt.

Rourkela, a growing industrial city surrounded by a swarm of backward tribal villages, has been the centre of hectic political activities for the Jharkhand movement. The tribals have launched a programme of Direct Action since August 1978 by way of organising general strikes, bundhs, hartals, dharnas to force the authorities to concede their demands.<sup>13</sup> Such activities, in turn, has resulted in promulgation of prohibitory orders in the affected areas and arrests of the agitators in which women are also included.

A study of the agitational part of the movement cannot be complete without making references to the programmes pursued by the agitators in the rural and forest areas. Large-scale felling of trees in the reserved forests is one of such programmes. The agitators never touch the trees such as the Sal and Mahua on the consideration that these are the natural flora and fauna of the Jharkhand while they go on felling the teak plantations. The campaign of felling trees on a large scale and gherao of forest officials have started in 1979. While launching such campaigns, they march with their traditional weapon, bow and arrow, and very often come in clashes with the police. Twenty-five persons are reported to have been killed recently in a clash between the military police and the agitators sponsored by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in the border areas of Orissa.<sup>14</sup>

As regards the involvement of parties in it, the movement is being claimed from the beginning as a movement led by a "united front" of all political parties of the region which have made a common cause against the "territory-grabbers". At the moment a number of political organizations are directly involved in the movement. They include both the factions of the All-India Jharkhand Party (one led by Bagun Sombrai and another by N. E. Horo), the Hul Jharkhand Party, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, the Bisra Seva Dal and the Marxist Co-ordination Committee. The regional unit of the Lok Dal had also shown its interest in the movement earlier. The emergence of the All Jharkhand Students' Union represents a very

critical phase in the movement. The students' leadership has assumed a militant role in the movement in articulating the grievances of the tribes.

Though originally it was exclusively a movement of the tribes, with the passage of time it has tended towards secularising its leadership with the association of non-tribes within its fold. Out of the six candidates fielded by the Jharkhand Party for the parliamentary poll in 1990 in this part of Orissa, three of them were not tribals. A Muslim candidate was also included among them. Moreover, the involvement of the marxists has added a new dimension to the movement. Obviously, it is no longer a movement like the regionalist movements in other parts of the country. It may be made clear in this context that at no stage, the movement has sought the participation of the tribes of southern Orissa despite the claim of historians that once upon a time the entire hilly and forest tract between Santhal Parganas and the uplands of Ganjam district was known as the Jharkhand.

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2. District Gazetteer, Sundargarh.
3. See H. K. Mahtab, *Beginning of the End*, Cuttack Students' Store, 1971.
4. Godabarish Mishra, *Saraikella and Kharswan* (in Oriya).
5. P. N. J. Purty & R. Kandulana, *Jharkhand ke Amar Shahid* (in Hindi) (Ranchi: Adivasi Sahitya Prachar Samity, 1969), p. 28.
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12. The periodicals and magazines include *Segen Sakam* (Rairangpur), *Baishat Kunumi* (Rairangpur), *Phagul Koel* (Kharagpur) etc.
13. *The Hindustan Standard* (Calcutta), 26th & 28th July 1976.
14. *The Samaj*, (Cuttack), 16th April, 1979.
15. For a detailed account of tribal politics and tribal discontentment, see R.N. Mishra, "Tribal Uprisings: 19th & 20th Century Orissa" in N.R. Ray et. al. (eds) *Challenge: A Saga of India's Struggle for Freedom* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1984, pp. 198-207); "Tribal Politics in Orissa" *Teaching Politics*, vol. VIII, 1982 No. 3 & 4 (Delhi); "Disruption of Tribal Social Organizations and the Demand for a Separate State of Jharkhand" in N.P. Chaubey (ed), *Tribal Techniques, Social Organization and Development: Disruption and Alternatives* (Allahabad: Indian Academy of Social Sciences, 1983, pp. 155-168).

## **Sikkim : From Theocracy To Democracy.**

**Aparna Bhattacharya\***

### **Introduction**

Sikkim, the tiny cosy erstwhile kingdom and presently a constituent State of the Indian Union, occupies a very strategic position in view of its geographical boundaries. This geographical personality must be considered as one of the prime factors for shaping the socio-political history of Sikkim. It is landlocked by Bhutan and Chumbi Valley in the east, Nepal in the west and Tibet in the north. It shares the southern border with West Bengal. Sikkim has an area of 7,300 k.m., and is somewhat rectangular in shape, 113 k.m. long and 64 k.m. wide<sup>1</sup>. In the map of India, Sikkim appears just as a speck above the border of Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The population of this tiny state is about 35 lac as per the Census of India, 1981. The territorial area of the State is divided into four districts : North, East, South, West. Gangtok, which is the headquarters of the East District, is also the capital town of the State of Sikkim.

The political history of Sikkim can be discussed by dividing it into three consecutive periods : (a) the period of Tibetan guardianship, (b) contact with the British and British protectorateship, and (c) the background of the new era and merger with India. Sikkim came into existence as the offshoot of Tibetan Lamaist polity. It was politically a theocracy till the other day. The theocracy was established by the Tibetan Buddhist Lamas and developed under the guidance and nourishment of Tibet. It has been generally accepted on the basis of historical evidence that the people from 'Kham' province of eastern Tibet first started to come down and settle in Sikkim from about 10th-11th centuries. One group of them also went to Bhutan and settled there almost at the same time. Besides being full of vegetation and having comparatively moderate cold weather, there were

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many other socio-political and religious reasons behind the migration of the Tibetans towards the southern parts of the Himalayas as well as their settling in Sikkim and Bhutan. It was the Tibetans who named this newly-occupied land as "Beyul Demojong" meaning the hidden land of rice.<sup>3</sup> The name 'Sikhim' or 'Sikkim' is comparatively new and became popular after the huge immigration of the Nepalese there since the last two decades of the 19th century. The word 'Sikkim' is believed to have been derived from the two Limbu words 'Su' and 'Khim' which mean the abode of Peace.<sup>3</sup>

### Tibetan Guardianship

'Tibet' in Sanskrit version is known as 'Bhota Desh' and the people of this Bhota Desh are labelled as 'Bhoutta'. It is presumed that this 'Bhoutta' gradually became 'Bhotea' or 'Bhutia'.<sup>4</sup> But the indigenous name for Tibet is *P'O* or *P'Oyul* which is spelt as 'Bod'. The word "P'Oyul" in Tibetan terminology poetically signifies the land of snow. This 'Bod', according to some scholars, is the origin of the term 'Bhotea' or 'Bhutia'.<sup>5</sup> Gradually, the Tibetans or the Bhutias occupied vast vacant lands in Sikkim and started to settle there. In course of time, an organised system of administration was, thus, required to control the newly established colony of the Bhutia settlers. Hence, as legend says, by the middle of the 17th century, three venerable Buddhist Lamas of Tibet came to Sikkim and established the 'Namgyal Dynasty' by consecrating a man, 'Phuntso' by name, from among the Tibetan settlers in 1642, just as the prototype of the Lamaist Tibet. The Lamas offered him the title 'Cho-gyal' meaning the Dharmaraja (the righteous king), with two-fold powers, both spiritual and temporal.<sup>6</sup> The ruling family and the ruling class in Sikkim were evidently those Bhutias of Tibetan origin. 'Vajrayana' or the Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism was recognised as the State religion of Sikkim.

Before the Tibetans or the Bhutia settlers came to Sikkim, the Lepchas claim to be the autochthones of Sikkim proper'. The Lepchas call themselves the 'Rong-pa' which means the 'Ravine Folk' as it is often common custom with the tribal people to use totem to identify themselves. The Lepchas by nature were too docile, placid and indolent to offer any resistance to the new Bhutia immigrants. They were

just as 'the woodmen of the wood'.<sup>7</sup> It was, thus, obvious for the Bhutia settlers to make an alliance with these aboriginal inhabitants of the place. The easy-going Lepchas readily accepted the trappings of 'Vajrayana' i.e. Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism and came under the fold of the socio-cultural and religious pattern established by the Bhutia settlers.

After the inception of the kingdom in Sikkim, the fifth Dalai Lama, the then Hierarch of Tibet, recognized the newly-coronated 'Cho-gyal' Phuntso Namgyal as the rightful ruler of the State and the political and religious suzerainty of the Tibetan Ruler was, thereby, established in Sikkim.<sup>8</sup> Though the Bhutia settlers in Sikkim, were mostly the followers of Nying-ma sect of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, the rulers of Sikkim had, from the beginning, accepted Tibet and the Hierarch Dalai Lama as the rightful guardian. "Sikkim had always looked upon itself as a dependency, a Vassal of Tibet, not because of any compulsion but because of voluntary submission springing from the Sikkimese Bhutia's origin, religion and above all the proximity of the two countries".<sup>9</sup> Since the birth of the Kingdom, whenever the State suffered from any internal disturbances or any external aggression from the neighbouring states of Nepal and Bhutan, the rulers of Sikkim had all the time looked to the Tibetan government for aid and advice and for help and protection. Tibet and Sikkim had free trade. The Head Lama of the Pema-Yangshi Monastery, the supreme monastery in Sikkim, had always come from Tibet and had administered not only the spiritual affairs but also guided the temporal issues of the country. It was a convention that the first queen of the Sikkim Rulers must be a Tibetan lady of high aristocrat family. "Their influence coupled with Tibetan proclivities of their husbands, promoted by the Nepalese invasion of the country, induced the Rajas to transfer the headquarters of their government to the valley of Chumbi, one march the Tibetan side of the Jelep Pass"<sup>10</sup>. The trainee monks of Sikkim were sent to different monasteries in Tibet for their higher studies in Buddhism. Tibet and Tibetan government, as the father guardian, had protected, given shelter and guided the administration of Sikkim, whenever there was any necessity, internally or externally. Another aspect should be mentioned here that as Tibet looked upon China as its suzerain, the Sikkim rulers



also accepted Chinese superiority and influence as an ally of her guardian state.<sup>11</sup>

In 1791 Gorkhas attacked Tibet, and ransacked Tashi-Lhump Monastery. The Chinese army came to the help of Tibet and defeated the Gorkhas pushing them back to Kathmandu. An ignominious treaty was signed thereafter, between Chinese authority and Nepal. But the then Sikkim ruler and his councillors were not satisfied with the settlement made by the Sino-Nepalese treaty over its territorial loss at the Chumbi valley which was appropriated by Tibet. Sikkim government as well as the high officials, for the first time, received a rude shock from the Tibetan-Chinese authorities. But they had no courage to encounter the mandates of powerful China. Because one of the results of the Manchu-Chinese intervention in the Nepalese-Tibetan conflict was the consolidation of Manchu-Chinese hegemony in Tibet by controlling her frontier defence, administration of finance and foreign intercourse.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, another greater power was waiting near the wall of the tiny Kingdom of Sikkim—the British casting an watchful eye just to get an opening to enter there.

#### **Contract with the British and British Protectorateship**

The British did not barge in Sikkim and grab her all on a sudden, though it was as easy as the hunting of an Yak for them. Sikkim could be annexed to the Indian empire, but it was not. Because the ultimate goal of the Britishers was to make the Tibet-China trade relation and the quest for a trade route to Tibet. The attention of the East India Company was attracted towards Sikkim due to its strategic importance. For centuries Sikkim had formed a very important trade route between India and Tibet and beyond it deep into central Asia. The natural passes through mountain barriers, the Nathu-la, Jelep-la, Thanka-la, and many others had been for centuries the doorways through which the shepherds took their flocks and traders carried their goods. The life line from India to China; these caravan routes had been the centre of intrigue.<sup>13</sup> Sikkim had, thus, no other attraction for the Britishers but to be exploited as the venue to enter in the prohibited land of Tibet. But sudden invasion in Sikkim or

#### CALCUTTA JOURNAL OF POLITICAL STUDIES

possession by force might have jeopardised the real end of the Britishers. So they watched, waited and proceeded step by step.

Gradually, "Sikkim was involved in the British diplomacy and was considered an ally of the British in the Anglo-Nepalese War,"<sup>14</sup> in the Sugauli Agreement in 1814. After that, the Treaty of Titalia was signed between the British and the Sikkim ruler in 1817 to settle the dispute over the boundary of Sikkim and Nepal. The treaty of Titalia was, no doubt, a trap to bind the Sikkim ruler in the British net. Article 3 of the said Treaty reads: "That he will refer to the arbitration of the British government any dispute or any question that may arise between his subjects and those of Nepal or any other neighbouring state, and to abide by the decision of the British government".<sup>15</sup> The Treaty of Titalia had a great political significance in the history of Sikkim. As observed by Grover, "It brought Sikkim for the first time under the influence of the Company and the freedom of action of Sikkim was limited to a great extent by the provisions of the treaty".<sup>16</sup> Secondly, the East India Company gained privilege to trade and the right to move upto Tibetan frontier. In this way, the Company succeeded to make the Sikkim Raja agree to cede the village 'Dorje-ling', presently known as Darjeeling, to the British government by a 'Deed of Grant' in the year 1835.

Another Treaty was forced on Sikkim, whereby Sikkim remained independent, just theoretically, but had to make vast concessions to the British government. By the Treaty of 1861, the British government had gained substantial advantages as it put an end to frontier troubles with Sikkim and secured full freedom for trade and commerce across Sikkim border, without having the need to annex her to British India empire. Finally, the Anglo-Chinese convention of 1890 specifically defined the British-Sikkim relation by recognizing the status of Sikkim as the British "Protectorate". The convention thereby established the direct and exclusive control over the internal administration and foreign relations of Sikkim. Except through and with the permission of the British government, neither the Ruler of the State nor any of its officers, would have official relations of any kind, formal or informal, with any other country.<sup>17</sup> Sir John Claud White, appointed as the first Political Officer in 1889, became the *de facto* Ruler of Sikkim. The Britishers brought a vigorous change in the population

composition and ethnic integrity of Sikkim. By the encouragement of the Britishers, a huge and rapid influx of Nepali immigrants consisting of various ethnic groups started to enter Sikkim and to press forward by clearing and cultivating the large areas of land in the southern parts of Sikkim. The Nepalese were industrious, laborious, advanced in agriculture and also were faithful and reliable, which the Britishers encashed to fulfil their purpose. But there was another secret intention of them for encouragement to the Hinduite Nepalese immigration in Sikkim, that was their very old and effective 'Divide and Rule' policy.

One important aspect should be noted here that the Christian missionaries had always played a very significant role for the establishment of European imperialism by converting the local people to Christianity. But in Sikkim they did not get a very easy access and could not break the iron gate of the Buddhist Monastic Fort. Only a handful of Lepchas were converted to Christianity by some Scandinavian missionaries at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But that was stopped with a strong hand by the Buddhist rulers of Sikkim.

#### **New Era and Merger with India**

Though Sikkim was not annexed to the British India empire, it was virtually converted into one of the Princely States of India. In the Government of India Act 1935, one seat was allotted for the State of Sikkim in the Council of States, mentioned as Division VII.<sup>18</sup> The then Maharaja of Sikkim, Sir Tashi Namgyal, had also been enjoying the membership in the Chamber of Indian Princes. But during the negotiation over independence of India in 1947, the issue of Sikkim's relation with India was left undecided. The Constituent Assembly as such had to recognise the special position of Sikkim and also of Bhutan during the making of the Indian Constitution. Under that circumstance a "Stand-still Agreement" was accordingly executed between the Government of India and the Ruler of Sikkim in February 1948, whereby all agreements, relations and administrative arrangements as to matters of common concern existing between the Crown and the Sikkim State on 14 August 1947 were

deemed to continue pending the conclusion of a new agreement or treaty.

While the twentieth century moved on fast bringing drastic changes in human history, time remained almost still in Sikkim and life stood far away from the mainstream of human progress. In the feudal society of Sikkim, the landlords, known as 'Kazi', were a class apart and dominated the economic field with their vested interest. There was no check on their powers. By long usages they became accustomed to oppress the people and to command utmost subservience from them. The second group was the handful of palace courtiers who made full use of the Maharaja's patronage at the cost of others. The centuries-old oppression contributed to general dissatisfaction amongst the people with a vague awareness of their rights and interests, privileges and prospects. After the independence of India, the Sikkimese people, all on a sudden, became alive to their helpless condition. In that background, the enlightened members of the common folk, specially educated in India, began slowly to awaken the revolutionary spirit among the common peasantry and the forced and bonded labourers. Three political parties were formed, viz. Praja Sudharak Samaj, Praja Sammelan, and Praja Mondal under the leadership of Tashi Tshering, Dhan Bahadur Tewari and Kazi Lendup Dorji respectively, within few months after India gained independence. In December 1947 all the three parties merged and formed a new party under the name 'Sikkim State Congress'. The Sikkim State Congress placed a memorandum with threefold demand to the Maharaja of Sikkim, viz. (a) abolition of landlordism, (b) formation of an interim government as a necessary precursor to a democratic and responsible government, and (c) accession of Sikkim to the Indian Union.<sup>19</sup>

The Ruler and his coterie were also not silent spectators. They realized that a powerful force was germinating among the common mass to blow up the whole feudal set-up of the kingdom. Hence, a counter political party named the National Party was formed by the statusquoist elements of the Sikkimese society under the direct and effective patronage of the Ruling House. The flag of the National Party had, with purposeful intention, been made to resemble the national flag of Sikkim.<sup>20</sup> The demand of accession of Sikkim

to India was, no doubt, ruled out immediately by the Ruler and his associates on the ground that Sikkim was never a part of India except the political relation which was also imposed on her by the Britishers. The policy of the National Party was, as it was declared in the resolution, 'to maintain intact by all means the indigenous character of Sikkim and to preserve its integrity'.<sup>21</sup> But the Ruling House realised that for the sake of political safety of the kingdom, some concessions should have to be given to the democratic forces agitating for a popular representation in the administration of the State. Therefore in 1953 the then Maharaja of Sikkim issued a constitutional proclamation for the formation of the 'State Council' and the 'Executive Council' with provisions for their composition, powers and functions. The subjects of administration were divided into two groups—Reserved and Transferred—to introduce a type of 'diarchy' system in the State. The first election to the State Council was held in 1953 and the seventeen-member State Council, formed on 7 August 1953, had to function within the limitations imposed by the Ruler.

The struggle, since then, between the statusquoist Ruler and his coterie, on the one side, and the democratic forces, on the other side, continued till 1974. Sikkim was, as L. B. Basnet has remarked, "a pseudo-democracy, the creation of the interplay of the 'neo-imperialistic' policies pursued by the Government of India, the protecting power, and the vaulting ambitions of the ruling house, which, while posing as an enlightened monarchy, had been successful in eroding whatever little of democracy was introduced in Sikkim in the first years of her contact with a newly-independent India".<sup>22</sup> But while the leaders and politicians of Sikkim were growing mature by indulging in political manoeuvring and internecine clashes by bungling, attacking, defecting and gaining personal interest, the position of Sikkim became very critical, all on a sudden, after the Chinese invasion in Tibet in 1959. The Indian army had to take measures to defend the frontier of this Arcolarian State. If Sikkim was lost, the eastern frontier would have been quite unsafe. After Sino-Indian conflict in 1962, Sikkim, because of her strategic geographic boundaries, became a sensitive area. On 2nd October

1962, an emergency was declared by the Indian Government and all the Sikkim-Tibet borders were sealed.

A drastic change also came in the internal situation of Sikkim during the same period. Maharaja Tashi Namgyal, who was renowned as the most glorious ruler of Sikkim, died in 1963. His son Pladen Thondup—pro-Tibetan and acknowledged reincarnate—was installed on the throne. At the time of Coronation he declared himself as the 'Cho-gyal'—the traditional title of the Tibetan origin, meaning 'Dharmaraja', by rejecting the 'Maharaja' attributed by the Britishers.<sup>23</sup> The innersignificance was realized later. Pladen Thondup was already the *de facto* ruler and the active brain behind the National Party of Sikkim. Now he got the formal authority too. His second wife Hope Cook, an American lady, became his great inspiration in nationalist movement.

The State Congress Party, on the other hand, was divided due to internal dissensions and a new Party emerged in the political arena of Sikkim under the leadership of Kazi Lendup Dorji titled Sikkim National Congress. The battle, since then, became concentrated to Chogyal Palden Thondup versus Kazi Lendup Dorji. The sentiments of Sikkim politics too were reflected openly into two opponent blocks—pro-India democratic force and anti-India traditionalist group motivated against Indian interference in the internal administration of the Kingdom. India should be a good friend, a financial supporter, as the traditionalists desired, but not a guardian.

The subsequent political developments were hectic. On 8th May 1973 the famous 'May Agreement' was signed by the Chogyal, the Indian foreign secretary and the representatives of the three major political parties of Sikkim. The Agreement provided the basis for the future constitutional set-up of Sikkim, to establish a fully responsible government with the guarantee of fundamental rights, the rule of law, an independent judiciary, greater legislative and executive powers for the elected representatives of the people, a system of election based on adult suffrage on the principle of one-man-one-vote etc. Above all, it was agreed that "Chogyal shall perform the functions of his office in accordance with the Constitution of Sikkim as set out in this Agreement."<sup>24</sup> In 1974 election the landslide victory of the Sikkim National Congress under the leadership of

Kazi Lendup Dorji in the 32 Assembly seats had finally cleared all the hurdles to merge Sikkim with India. The House passed a historic resolution that "The institution of the Chogyal is hereby abolished and Sikkim shall henceforth be a constituent unit of India, enjoying a democratic and fully responsible government". The Indian Parliament, on the other side, passed the Constitution (Thirty-Sixth Amendment) Act, on 16 May 1975, and Sikkim got the legal recognition as the 22nd State of India. "Sikkim's traditional monarchy, enthroned in customary law, deriving sanctity from Buddhist faith, solemnized by the oath of Kabi and legitimized by the centuries of recognition by China, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Britain and India" was ended and she got the new political identity in the form of people's government,<sup>26</sup> as a constituent State of the Indian Union.

### Two Decades After Merger

The most striking and dramatic change that has made Sikkim a separate entity is her politics. The 32 members in the 1974 Sikkim Assembly, who brought about the merger, are now almost ousted from the political scene. And Kazi Lendup Dorji, who was the pioneer of the merger, is not only out of politics but has also gone out of Sikkim after being defeated twice in the election in 1979 and in 1985. The present Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari, who massively won three consecutive elections, had come in power with the backing of the pro-Palace and anti-merger forces. His party, which was formerly named Sikkim Janata Parishad and now Sikkim Sangram Parishad, has penetrated its roots in the soil of Sikkim as a non-communal party. Bhandari has been able to create his image as pro-Sikkim, but not pro-Nepali, though he belongs to the Nepali community. He has, thus, earned the confidence of the Bhutia-Lepcha community too.

In the Assembly of Sikkim, 19 seats out of 32 are reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha community, though numerically they constitute only 25% of the total population. The Bhutia-Lepcha community has been declared a Scheduled Tribe under the Scheduled Caste-Scheduled Tribe Order (Amendment) Act, 1976. Besides, there is an unique constituency known as "Sangha Constituency" which is

to elect a Lama member to the Assembly. Needless to say, these Lamas exclusively belong to the Bhutia-Lepcha community. This Sangha constituency was created by the Proclamation of His Highness the Maharaja of Sikkim in 1966, which was to elect one Lama member to the State Council through an Electoral College consisting of all the Buddhist monasteries in Sikkim. Surprisingly, the Sangha seat is specifically retained even after Sikkim became a constituent State of the secular Indian Union, and the Representation of the People Act was suitably amended for that purpose. Hence, no party in Sikkim is, and will be, able to come to power without having a compromising attitude towards the Bhutia-Lepcha group and getting their support. Bhandari's non-communal image is one of the important reasons for his victory.

Secondly, all the three elections in 1979, 1985 and 1990 have demonstrated one important point that the national political parties of India have no influence in the politics of Sikkim. It is localism and regionalism which still call the tune. This is the reason why in the State legislature as well as in parliamentary elections in Sikkim, the all-India political parties practically drew blank except Congress (I) party which could manage to win one seat only out of 32 Assembly seats it had contested in 1985-election and that too was a plainsman candidate with business background. The success of a regional party would depend on how far and how best it can effectively raise the local issues and encash them. The slogan behind the victory of N. B. Bhandari in 1979 was "Return Sikkim, Sikkim for Sikkimese". Here "Sikkimese" means the Sikkimese of Bhutia-Lepcha origin and Sikkimese of Nepali origin. The Sikkim Sangram Parishad of Bhandari not only won the Sangha seat where voters are purely Bhutia-Lepcha monks, but also all the 12 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha community in the election of 1990. Bhandari is seriously concerned for maintaining communal harmony and prosperity which would be destroyed in the event of an influx of outsiders, and this also may pull him down from his position. At the same time, he is advocating to the central government in New Delhi for granting citizenship to 75 thousands of stateless persons, mainly migrated from the neighbouring Nepal to Sikkim and also for including the Nepali Language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. He is thereby



cultivating the support of the majority of the Nepalese in Sikkim. Chief Minister Bhandari is playing the issue as a dice in his political game with the Centre. He contends that a large number of people who voted for the abolition of the monarchy and for Sikkim's merger with India in 1975 'Special Poll', later known as the 'Referendum', are yet to be granted Indian citizenship. The participants in the said referendum were Sikkimese residents but not bonafide 'Sikkim subjects' of the kingdom. The problem is : "if this charge is true, then it means that the 'Referendum' of 1975, which deposed the Chogyal, erased Sikkim's status as a protected kingdom and merged it with India, was illegal and unconstitutional".<sup>26</sup> The Central Government, for the last two decades, is just applying the healing balm on the sensitive political ache in that border State by financial appeasement only.

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## On the Style of Middle-Class Politics : The Case of Assam ( 1979-1983 )

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### Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to comprehend properly the *style* of *middle-class* politics in Assam. The style is defined as 'certain persistent features of political culture, some kinds of group formations and collective political actions ( but not others ) and also some particular ways of raising certain political issues ( but not others ) :<sup>1</sup> We only expect that the style of middle-class politics in Assam will be unique more in their combination rather than in isolation. The *Assamese middle class* comprises petty officials, the intelligentsia, academics and professionals, small and medium-sized traders and businessmen and not more than 'half a dozen middle bourgeoisie'<sup>2</sup> etc. Viewed thus, the Assamese middle class is seen to possess at least two notable characteristics. First, it is only apparent that the class is drawn almost exclusively from service sector, having little or no links whatsoever with the other two productive sectors of the economy —agriculture and industry. In ordinal terms, it does not lie in the middle either for there is no class amongst the Assamese that is situated above it ( for instance, an agrarian bourgeoisie or an industrial one ). Secondly, the 'Assamese middle class' does not exhaust the middle class in Assam. The latter is also drawn from other ethnic communities like the Bengalis, the Marwaris and also to a smaller extent, the Nepalis.<sup>3</sup> In other words, our concept of 'Assamese middle class' actually belongs to a point of intersection between class and ethnic categories. It is one of those occasions in history when the emergence of classes does not result in the obsolescence of ethnic communities.

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The formulation of our problem is grounded on the central assumption that politics in Assam is *predominantly* middle class in character. This is by no means to claim that the former can be subsumed under what we call 'middle-class' politics. In fact, there is reason to think that politics in Assam spreads beyond the confines of middle class politics and *sometimes* (though not always) makes a critique of its *raison d'être*.

The paper lays down some of the necessary elements of an analytical framework for conducting the inquiry and intends to list out some of the major characteristics of the politics of the Assamese middle class.

There are three significant limitations of our inquiry. First, unless otherwise stated, the scope of this paper is limited to the period of 1979-1983. The period under review cannot be properly appreciated unless it is placed in the broader historical perspective. It is for this reason that what precedes as well as what follows the period under review have been discussed as necessary. Secondly, the treatment can hardly be said to be chronological, the main purpose being to build up an argument of some theoretical importance. Thirdly, the style of middle class politics cannot be taken to be an independent variable. The style is affected, among other things, by the nature and functioning of the Indian state.

### **The Analytical Framework**

Most of the researches on the field under study emphasize the fact that politics in Assam is marked by the supremacy of the Assamese middle class. The supremacy is usually defined as its success in (i) initiating and sustaining not just one single movement but a series of movements since Independence; (ii) eliciting and harbouring a consensus that could involve the general masses of people in almost all of them.

It is further argued that the supremacy of the Assamese middle class amounts to what in current social theory is called *hegemony*.

The class is considered to be hegemonic in either of the two mutually exclusive senses. First, it may mean that the Assamese middle class (though mostly successful in involving general masses of people in their movements) was able to 'represent' its own interests in isolation from or rather say, at the expense of those of the general masses. Thus, the entire Assamese community is relegated to 'false consciousness'. As Amalendu Guha observes:

Ethnicity was not a given factor to which politics responded; rather, ethnicity-awareness was encouraged and exploited by upper classes for political ends ( Guha, 1980 : 1705-6 )

On the other hand, the Assamese middle class is believed to be hegemonic because it was able to 'represent' the overall interests of an otherwise 'organically united' society of the Assamese.<sup>4</sup>

### Style of Middle-Class Politics

We seek here to look into some of the persistent features of middle class politics ( that taken together, would constitute its style ); its movemental and yet organizationally fragmented nature, its rabid anti-intellectualism curiously coupled with a kind of unprecedented consensualism that one does not normally find elsewhere and most importantly, its penchant for self-reliance in course of its political activities.

### The Movemental Nature

Coming to Assam, what stares one at one's face is the *movemental* nature of its middle class politics and the Assamese middle class, perhaps not without reason, is commonly designated as 'agitationist' and sometimes less charitably, as 'xenophobic'. Here, we present a select catalogue of movements (not all of which have been sponsored by the Assamese middle class) that swept the politics in Assam since Independence.

Table—1

## A Select Catalogue of Movements (1947-1985)

| Sl. No. | Year    | Movement                        | Sponsoring Organization  |
|---------|---------|---------------------------------|--|
| 1       | 1960    | Official Language Movement      | All-Assam Students' Federation (under the banner of Students' Association of Gauhati), All-Assam Students' Association, Assam Students' Federation, Assam Sahitya Sabha. |
| 2       | 1960    | Anti-official Language Movement | All-Assam Minority Students' Union   |
| 3       | 1966-7  | Food Movement                   | Communist Party of India, All-Assam Students' Union  |
| 4       | 1968    | Anti-SRC Movement               | Do   |
| 5       | 1972    | Medium of Instruction Movement  | All-Assam Students' Union, Assam Sahitya Sabha   |
| 6       | 1974    | Bodo-Kachari Movement           | Plains Tribals Council of Assam, Minority Peoples' Rights Committee  |
| 7       | 1974    | Mishing Movement                | Mishing Students' Union  |
| 8       | 1979-83 | Anti-Foreigners Movement        | All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad, All-Assam Students' Union etc.  |

Source : Chattopadhyay ( 1990 : 56-91 )

This catalogue of movements sensitizes us to at least three important features of the Assamese movements. First, not all the movements noted above have been launched or sustained by the Assamese middle class. There were other middle classes (drawn mainly from the Bengalis or the tribals like the Bodo-Kacharis, Mishings, etc.) who also jumped into the fray. The Marwaris and the Nepalis though economically viable (the Marwaris, for instance, are more viable than the Bengalis) have largely remained quiescent during the period under review. The Marwaris are beginning to organize themselves (through such organizations as Purbottar

Hindibhashi Samaj ) only since the turn of 1980s. During the period 1979-83, the All-Assam Nepali Students' Union more or less consistently subscribed to the ideology of anti-Foreigners movement. So, it only shows that the middle classes in Assam are not only ethnically fragmented but also at times up in arms against one another. Secondly, it is evident that the middle classes drawn from the non-Assamese sections of the populace are basically on the defensive. Thus, for instance, if it is an Official Language Movement ( 1960 ) organized and sustained by the Assamese middle class then there has to be an anti-official language movement (at about the same time) to be floated by the non-Assamese middle classes of the Bengalis as well as the tribals like the Bodo-Kacharis. So, the middle class movements in Assam have by and large been self-spiralling. Thirdly, there were other movements also during the same period ( 1947-85 ) fought on such issues as establishing an oil refinery in Assam in the early-1970s. In other words, the Assamese middle class need to resort to a movement even to establish an oil refinery, the first of its kind in Assam ; that is to say, the state has been inordinately deaf vis-a-vis the Assam movement and the Assamese middle class has frequently to resort to 'shock treatment' to keep it alive to its demands.<sup>5</sup>

### Fragmented Nature

That the Assamese middle class could organize itself into so many movements since Independence does not mean that its strength lies in its being united into one single, all-embracing organization. The organizationally fragmented nature of the Assamese middle class in particular and regional political parties in the region, in general ( Pakem, 1989 : 23-37 ) is already much too well-known. Even, All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad that is largely credited for launching and sustaining a mass movement like this for too long almost uninterruptedly was itself a conglomerate of many regional parties ( e.g., Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal and Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad ) and pressure groups ( e.g., All-Assam Students' Union, Assam Sahitya Sabha ). There were some lesser known organizations : Assam Jatiya Yuva Vahini, Assam Matri Vahini, Assam Mula-Gavru Sanstha, Assam Yuva Sanstha, Sadou-Assam Mahila Parishad,

Assam Jagrata Mahila Parishad, Assam Jatiyatabadi Mohila Parishad, Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chhatra Parishad, Sadou-Assam Karmachari Sanstha, All-Assam Volunteers' Force, North-East Region Students' Union, Sadou-Assam Sanskritik Samanvay Vahini, Sadou-Assam Shramik Karmachari Parishad, Assam Civil Service Association, All-Assam Government and Semi-Government Employees' Organization, North-East India Master Printer's Union etc.

The Assamese middle class is organizationally fragmented not because there was a numerical diffusion of too many organizations but because their numerical diffusion posed disproportionately high problems of coordination and unity amongst them. Even the constituents of AAGSP at the peak of the movement in early 1983 did not refrain from fighting against one another. The expulsion of Jatin Goswami, the representative of Assam Sahitya Sabha from the AAGSP combine in April 1981 was strongly resented by the then General Secretary of the Sabha. Nibaran Bora, the veteran leader who founded Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad in 1978, left the party on 25 September 1981 on the ground that the Party was 'not adequately firm' in charting out an anti-foreigner stance. Bora remained for long the principal 'theoretician' of the movement.

It is true that the organizations on the firing line sometimes fought amongst themselves. But the fight within the organization sometimes becomes so acute that it comes to a head and has to be solemnized into a split. Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal, for instance, was an erstwhile constituent of AAGSP. The Dal was formed in July 1976 and had to be split into two in a session that ironically was meant for the celebration of its third anniversary.

Not all cases of in-fighting give birth to such formalized splits but nevertheless pose problems for internal discipline and organizational unity. All-Assam Students' Union, for instance, went through a particularly turbulent period in its internal management during late-1982 and early-1983 precisely when the movement was entering into a new high. Even Nurul Hussain, one of the chief office-bearers of the Union, had to be expelled from the organization. Hussain proved to be a thorn in the Union's flesh especially during the fierce communal battles of February-March 1983.

The organizationally fragmented nature of the movement created



confusions so much so that Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal at one point had to publicly clarify that the Assam Jatiyatabadi Mahila Parishad was not its women's wing. At times, the AASU had to take pains to retain the popular tide in its favour. It felt particularly threatened by such left organizations as Indian Peoples' Front in the immediate aftermath of the large-scale communal battles.

Still it seems that when it comes to the crunch the Assamese middle class has demonstrated its surprising ability to get itself united by way of quickly forging coalitions and alliances albeit of short-term nature. All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad was established in 1979 and as the name suggests, with the obvious intention of launching and sustaining the movement. But the forging of AAGSP was no ordinary affair—it went through a difficult and arduous process. As the movement was round the corner and beats were moving fast the need for forging it was increasingly being felt. On 7 November 1979, a massive rally was organized in Guwahati 'to resolve that no election should be held until foreigners are omitted from the voters' list.' Apart from AASU, it was attended by Girin Baruah, President of Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal, Dr. Nishipada Chaudhury of Assam Sahitya Sabha, Prasenjit Brahma of PTCA (Progressive), Bharat Narah, AASU's actg. General Secretary, Amrik Singh of Sikh Gurdwara, Ghulam Murdad Ahmed, Nilima Dutta, Atul Bora and Girdharilal Jain representing different organizations. Besides, an 'All-communities organization' was set up at Nabin Bardoloi Hall of Gauhati University that expressed 'support and solidarity for the movement' way back on 25 November 1979. The North-East Region Students' Union however was established much earlier (July 1979). This is equally a large, loose and confederative body of representatives from the 'seven sisters' of the region.

What is striking is not so much the capability on the part of the Assamese middle class of forging alliances within a short notice but very much the rapidity of their changing configurations. For instance, when the movement came to a close in 1985 and AAGSP outlived its utility, a new combine of Assam Gana Parishad came into being with much fanfare (Phukon, 1988 : 58—64). In 1991, the Parishad was broken into two giving birth to a new party of Nutan Assam Gana Parishad that incidentally cut a sorry figure in the elections (1991).

In Assam, alliances keep changing from one form to the other. The change-over from AAGSP to AGP was not a simple change in nomenclature. It was also a dropping out of such organizations as AASU and Assam Sahitya Sabha. On the other hand, the beginning of 1991 witnessed at least three major regional parties in Assam viz. Samyukta Lok Parishad of Nibaran Bora, Assam Jatiya Parishad of Dr. Binay Kumar Tamuli, and Assam Jatiya Chetana Manch led by Anup Bardoloi, all coming together to unseat the ruling government, apart from AGP, NAGP and ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam). Eleven political parties—AGP, Janata Dal, Congress (S), CPI, BJP, UMF(A), UMF(J), Congress (I), PTCA, CPI(M) and URMCA—have assembled together to wipe out 'the ULFA menace'. In other words, the chemistry of alliances does not remain the same over the years and politics really makes strange bedfellows.

Political organizations in Assam are like fire-fighting devices. They come into play sometimes, into being when the fire of movement breaks out with the manifest purpose of containing the popular mobilization. Viewed thus, they are more a product of the movement than the other way round<sup>6</sup>. To cite an instance, the local Branch Units of AAGSP in *Uzani Assam* were to be formed as late as in December 1979 (only after the movement had already taken off) and that too at the initiative of the people or as *The Assam Tribune* puts it, 'spontaneously' by them.

The Assamese middle class oscillates between two extremes: either it is not organized at all so much so that it more often than not is taken aback by the force of the movement or else, it is organized in a diversity of institutions only intermittently and, of course, never on a stable basis.

#### Anti-Intellectualism

Yet another noteworthy characteristic of the Assamese middle class politics is its rabid anti-intellectualism. By this, it is not implied that the Assamese intellectuals (a segment of the Assamese middle class) did not participate at all in the movement. Quite the contrary. At no point of time did either Gauhati University Teachers' Associa-

tion or Assam Sahitya Sabha, the cream of the Assamese intellectuals ever abstain from participating in political movements. But the point is: the Assamese intellectuals did not participate in them *qua* intellectuals. They rather participated in ways that were not only available to other segments of their class (say, the traders) but tried by them. Four of their major forms of participation may be noted here:

(a) Assam Sahitya Sabha once urged its more than 500-odd Branch Units to send express telegrams to the President of India apprising him of the gravity of the threat to the Assamese identity and culture posed by the unlimited immigration of 'foreigners'.

(b) GUTA issued press releases to mobilize public opinion in Assam as well as outside and to ask the government to observe restraints.

(c) Assam Sahitya Sabha undertook far-flung countryside tours in Assam to mobilize public opinion or as goodwill missions to rivet the bonds of communal amity in Assam or both.

(d) Almost all intellectual organizations (not all their members) participated, without fail, in all the action programmes of the movement chalked out from time to time by AAGSP and AASU. None of the above paths of participation is closed to other partners of the middle class. Nor any of them speaks of their being different from other segments of their class.

The intellectual participation is basically an art of making discourses. As Edward A. Shils writes:

There is in every society a minority of persons who, more than the ordinary run of their fellow men, are inquiring and desirous of being in frequent communion with symbols which are more general than the immediate concrete situations of everyday life and remote in their reference in both time and space. In this minority, there is a need to externalize this quest in oral and written discourse, in poetic and plastic expression, a historical reminiscence or writing, in ritual performance and acts of worship. This interior need to penetrate beyond the screen of immediate concrete experience marks the existence of intellectuals in every society. (Shils, 1972 : 3)

This 'interior need to penetrate' beyond the world of appearance is

is the crux of the enterprise of discourse-making. Viewed thus, the task of a discourse is to blur and overcome the distinctions of time and space and to establish direct contacts with the past. That is to say, the intellectuals 'imbue those circumstances and activities with an appearance of naturalness or of order, so that the utterly new may appear to be a variation on a theme' (Roseberry, 1989 : 42). In other words, an intellectual is defined as a maker of the discourse. One is an intellectual to the extent one engages oneself in the task of effacing the barriers of time and space with the help of a discourse.

An intellectual helps in shaping a community's perception of time and space in a manner that readily establishes the *illusion* of a continuity with the tradition. As we are told, a community's perception of time is cyclical. That is to say, the community always traces its past in a pristine state of vitality. At the second level, there is a vertical downfall from its pristine purity at the instance of the intervening forces from outside. At the third level, where the community traces its future, it wants to recuperate and relive its pristine past through a conscious endeavour. In its project of recuperation, it tends cyclically to repeat what it perceives to have lost in the past (Chatterjee, 1989).

The notion of time of the Assamese community is markedly different from the cyclical notion of time that subaltern historiographers have underscored. Lakshminandan Bora's *Akou Saraighat* (1980) that has to do with the movement, the only of its kind, is a case in point. Time here is certainly not cyclical, but is the linear, calendrical diffusion of the supposedly 'original' and 'inexhaustible' ('galaxy of burning stars') vitality of the community through certain enactments and re-enactments. The Assam movements, for instance, is only a re-enactment of the historic battle of Saraighat that successfully repulsed the Moghul's final bid to annex Assam.

Be that as it may, the Assamese intellectuals were singularly incapable of making a discourse for the movement in which most of them took an active part. However, no analysis of the role of Assamese intellectuals can begin without a reference to Hiren Gohain's writings. His thesis is two-fold. First, the Assamese middle class, according to him, is plagued by a certain 'poverty of thought' and in consequence, all the movements initiated by it are 'thoughtless and

'superficial' (Gohain, 1976 : 97). Elsewhere, he reiterates the same point. (Gohain, 1985 : XXIV-XXV)

In an informal interview, Gohain recalled how French Revolution of 1789 led to a consequent 'revolutionization' of the literature in the entire continent<sup>7</sup>. His contrast with the French Revolution might at first sight be harsh and appalling. But the message is clear : everywhere the emergence of middle class is associated with a certain enrichment of literature and culture of the society.

On the other hand, Gohain believes that the Assamese intellectuals are the juke-box of the establishment : 'They beat the trumpet in praise of the government and the bourgeoisie' (Gohain, 1976 : 98). Their objective is limited to unseating the ruling bourgeoisie and to occupy their positions without destroying the system in which such a project is to take place. Indeed, for Gohain, two arguments are complementary : if the Assamese intellectuals suffer from what Gohain calls, 'thoughtlessness and superficiality' that is because of the fact that they do not come to realize that 'the government and the bourgeoisie' (read : the state, SKD) is *antagonistically* opposed to the Assamese nationality question. A 'socialist India', as Gohain puts it, is the only answer to India's tangled nationality question (Gohain, 1985 : 87).

It is difficult to put the first part of Gohain's argument into examination as it shades into the domain of literary criticism. But it would certainly not be dodging through if we argue that there is not much in the literary scene in Assam (having to do with the movement) that can be made subject to serious intellectual scrutiny. Besides Lakshminandan Bora's *Akou Saraighat*, Nirmalprabha Bardoloi's collection of lyrical and patriotic poems published during the movement deserves a special mention. Apart from these, Prasenjit Duara painted 25 pictures portraying various moods of the Assam movement and held an exhibition at Guwahati on 25 February 1980. Besides them, there is almost nothing in the intellectual scene in Assam that should draw our attention.

One of the literary areas that is usually seen to be most affected by the movements of this sort is that of little magazines. Little magazines in Assam may not be famous for their literary worth, but they have already become quite infamous because they have already made a good brisk business taking advantage of the movement. (Dutta, 1980).

Hiren Gohain is not unaware of the extreme paucity of intellectual productions in Assam. He points out :

At a time when the number of publications in (West) Bengal exceeds 3000, the number of Assamese publications comes down to even less than 100. In this due to the conspiracy of the *bahiragatas* (outsiders) ? (*trans. mine*, Gohain, 1976 : 105).

Even a fairly recent estimate is now available to us : 'we have in this state a population of 16 million which is more than that of entire Australia and higher than the population figures of the countries like Denmark, Sweden and Ireland. But the annual publication of Assamese books (titles) seldom exceeds 200 while the average figure varies between 125 to 150. The print order of an Assamese novel rarely exceeds 5000 and hardly a dozen Assamese literature have seen the fourth edition in course of one single decade. Excepting books written by the poets of the Baishnava era none of the books by the modern writers have been able to find access into the lakhs of rural households' (Chakravarty, 1979).

A good part of this extreme paucity of intellectual productions may indeed be attributed to the dearth of reading public in Assam. Since there was such a paucity of intellectual productions we may conclude that there were not many 'trumpets' in the hands of the Assamese intellectuals to beat 'in praise of the government and the 'bourgeoisie', as Hiren Gohain thinks. To put it simply, this paucity of intellectual productions marks the Assamese movement.

The second part of Gohain's observation takes us to the second reason why we put emphasis on the non-intellectual nature of the Assamese movement. The Assamese intellectuals have by and large been successful in making and maintaining a distinction, nay a dichotomy, between the movement, on the one hand, and their literary commitments, on the other. They move as if in two worlds—each opposed to the other—the political world of the movement and the literary world of 'creativity' and do not allow the first to interfere with the second. There is much anguish being expressed against this duality of the Assamese intellectuals. Litterateurs like Nirmalprabha Bardoloi have expressed shock at the sorry state of

the Assamese intellectuals. As Homen Bargohain in a recent interview has forcefully argued :

I can emphatically say that there is no Assamese writer, whether renowned or not, in whose writing anti-Indian or secessionist mentality is ever revealed (*Trans. mine*, Bargohain, 1991 : 31 ).

Although both Gohain and Bargohain are in agreement with the point that the Assamese intellectuals in their literary expressions are neither 'anti-Indian' nor 'secessionist', for Gohain, it is a grievous failure on their part to get to the heart of the dialectic. They are yet to comprehend the antagonistic nature of the contradiction between the Assamese nationality and the state. The Assamese intellectuals, however, make no bones about their convictions.

The questions of violence and political independence of Assam are being thrown into limelight by ULFA and almost all the Assamese intellectuals shun violence or ULFA's bids for political independence of Assam at least on four different counts :

(a) Violence *per se* is essentially immoral whether it delivers the goods or not ;

(b) Political independence of Assam will not do any good to Assam as it has historically been unable to do any good to the post-colonial societies, in general ;

(c) It might be easy on ULFA's part to wrest political independence away from the Indian state. It would, however, be difficult to defend it in the long run because ULFA simply does not have the means to defend it ;

(d) If Assam becomes politically independent it will set the ball rolling. West Bengal and Kashmir will demand political independence tomorrow. India will be torn into pieces.<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that the Assamese intellectuals do not make a decisive break with the paradigm of the Indian state almost by choice. They belong to it. As Homen Bargohain has put it : 'The Assamese intellectuals are keen on moving closer to the Indian state' (Bargohain, 1991 : 31 ). In other words, they still remain imprisoned to the discourse of the Indian state. Perhaps, it is Hiren Gohain who more than anyone else is fighting a solitary battle to establish a 'socialist' discourse.

Both extreme paucity of intellectual productions and the Assamese intellectuals' imprisonment to the paradigm of the Indian state give credence to our contention that the movement was basically non-intellectual (rather than anti-intellectual) in character. It is interesting to see how a movement that remained yet to be intellectually defended by a discourse or, better say, became indefensible by a discourse to which the intellectuals subscribed turns into a rabidly anti-intellectual movement in due course. This is discernible from at least two distinguishable trends in mellowing, marginalising or even muting dissents which are otherwise intellectually worthwhile in our sense of the term.

First, there were anti-intellectual—coercive and intimidatory—means of throttling out such dissents. Hiren Gohain and Biman Kar, both senior professors of Gauhati University, were attacked on 7 and 21 June respectively in 1980. On 17 August in the same year, the press in which the Asamiya progressive weekly *Kalakhar* is printed was attacked and damaged. Again, a PUCL team noted with concern that the attack on the Asamiya paper *Nagarika* in 1980 'is only one of the many examples of the way in which the left and democratic newspapers, individuals and activists are treated'. (PUCL, 1980 : 21) (emphasis added)

So, the Assamese intellectuals did not build up a discourse to fall back upon in defence of the movement they were waging. Nor was there anything on their part to earnestly enter into a serious dialogue with the intellectual detractors of the movement. They put quite a premature end to the possibilities of a dialogue.

Not in all cases the detractors of the movement are threatened with physical annihilation. In many cases, 'anyone critical of the movement', particularly the makers of counter-discourse (i.e. secular conscience), are 'terrorized' (PUCL, 1982 : 114) and such 'terrorization' took the forms of ostracization or subjection of the intellectuals to ridicule and rebuff and a varying range of stigmatization.

Thus, to resort to non-intellectual means for obliterating dissenters (rather than the dissent) means that the counter-discourse is never intellectually met. In effect, 'terrorization' of its makers could not amount to a dismantling of their counter-discourse. Ironically, the



Assamese movement had to live with a counter-discourse even if it was devoid of a discourse of its own.

### Consensualism

The Assamese middle class was also largely successful in initiating a movement that eventually could draw people from all sectors of the society in overwhelming numbers. This in itself speaks of the underlying consensus in the Assamese society. The point can be confirmed from two mutually contending sources. *The Assam Tribune* in one of its editorials pointed out that the November (1979) *gana satyagraha* was "reminiscent of the country's freedom movement" while a CPI pamphlet designated the movement as a whole as "an unprecedented renaissance" and also "a mass upsurge" (CPI, 1983 : 8, 10 ).

It is interesting to see how such a consensus could not only come about but sustain itself without a crack for over six years. A good part of the said consensus was established by simple violence and coercion. Each number of *Kalakhar* during the period was replete with stories of horrible atrocities on the adversaries, particularly the minorities. But there were not many instances of such violence and coercion as there were not many instances of such violence and coercion as there were not many adversaries and dissenters to be put down. Even *Bangabhashi Asamtiya Samaj* ( Bengali-speaking Assamese society ) passed several resolutions expressing sympathy with the main demands of the movement.

The organisers of the movement, again, took recourse to certain measures which are otherwise *socially* practised. The severest of them was, of course, ostracization. Ostracization over the years had undergone a process of institutionalization. The trend is clear at least in two major respects. First, at one stage, AASU had to come forward to publicly state that to ostracize anyone is a prerogative that only belongs to its central headquarters at Guwahati. Thus, it expressly prevented its Branch Units from taking recourse to this measure of social control. The public statement in simple terms establishes the monopoly right of its central command in this regard. Ostracization heretofore was to be centrally administered. But in a traditional society it rests with local initiative,

Secondly, anyone meted with such a punishment retains the right to make an appeal for clemency ( with relevant *documents* ) to the central command. Thus, an essentially *social* form of punishment is also formalized in paraphernalia and documents.

Two things stand out in the above discussion. First, the strength of the middle-class ( initiating and sustaining a movement of this sort for too long ) lies neither in its capacity to organize nor in its capacity to articulate an intellectual discourse but in its capacity to exercise violence and coercion and also gradually to appropriate the essentially social forms of control and punishment.

In the process, AASU turned out to be the central adjudicating body of the Assamese society more than the established judicial system under the auspices of the state. But this body cannot be regarded as an armature of a 'parallel government' pitted against the state in general and the established judicial system in particular. Elsewhere, it has been argued that the faith in the paradigm of the Indian state was never completely shaken during the movement (Das, 1990).

In this connexion it may be pointed out that AASU's system of social control is in sharp contrast with that of ULFA. There are two points of such a contrast. First, AASU's system of control is *essentially* social. Its primary objective is to appropriate them to maintain discipline and wipe out dissenters and adversaries both from within the movement and from without. But ULFA's control is substantially political for it is issued from a principled opposition to the state's claim to monopolize the instruments of violence and coercion.

Secondly, their respective modes of enforcing control are also spectacularly different. The measures of social control during 1979-83 were centrally administered whereas the decisions concerning these are collectively undertaken by the ULFA.

#### **Pendant for Self-Reliance**

Finally, an ever-growing pendant for self-reliance also characterizes the middle-class politics in Assam during the movement under review. This is particularly evident in the area of students' politics of Assam. Students have always been at the forefront of the Assamese movement.

The penchant for self-reliance can be understood in two relatively distinguishable ways. First, much of what the students did in Assam during 1979-83 was ceremonial by nature with the obvious intention of gaining an easy publicity mileage from the bulk of the Assamese society. Thus in the wake of *gana satyagraha* in November 1979 many students came to serve as shoeshine boys/girls in central business district of Guwahati and were able to gather an astonishing sum of more than Rs. 6,000 within just a few days to raise funds for the movement. They also resorted to begging (*mustibhiksha*) to purchase relief materials to help the flood-affected victims next year. The real worth of these contributions should not be assessed in monetary terms but in terms of the enormous public sympathy that the students could muster in their favour.

Secondly, AASU also launched several social service schemes for constructing roads and embankments in order to control floods and other natural catastrophies, repairing dilapidated hutments of the rural poor, reconstructing public structures, cleaning of *namghars* (central places of worship), quickly disposing garbages, especially in city areas etc. The central objective of its economic campaign was to arouse public consciousness against artificial economic crises created by hoarding and price hikes taking advantage of the disruptions caused by the movement (in most cases, the greedy businessmen happened to be the non-Assamese ones).

There are differences between two campaigns of self-reliance— one launched by AASU and another by ULFA. Two points of difference can easily be traced. First, AASU's campaign for self-reliance springs from twin objectives of gaining an easy publicity mileage and keeping the people engaged in the movement by way of coming to the help of those who had to suffer a lot during the movement (for instance, when their homes are burnt or near and dear ones are killed). One of AASU's main challenges was to stem the fast-growing disenchantment of the people with the movement. Tens of letters were published in the editorial columns of *The Assam Tribune* and *Dainik Asom* as early as in 1979 (just after the movement was taking off) hoping that the movement would not be continued for too long at the expense of students' studies and precious academic years. Hence, AASU's campaigns in this respect paid good dividends in due course.

ULFA's campaigns are much wider in scope than those of AASU,

They include such campaigns as abolition of drinking (this also has infuriated a large number of tribals) and illiteracy and establishment of community forms etc. AASU leaders are still in accord with these to a great extent. But ULFA's objective is basically political (rather than social). PUDR report notes :

ULFA itself takes objection to any description of their programmes as constructive or welfare activities. They consider them as 'instruments of political mobilization', part of what they call *sashastra prachar* (armed propaganda).

Elsewhere, one of ULFA's spokesmen has pointed out that the main objective behind all such campaigns was to restore 'confidence' in the minds of the people so that they do not easily give themselves to the trickery and machinations of the Indian State (ULFA-rsange...1991 : 74).

If this objective is what informs all their objectives then it must be said that they have already been successful in accomplishing it : 'A large section of the population of the state, however, actually welcomes this development' (Ahmed, 1990 : 120).

Secondly, there is a difference pertaining to their respective attitudes towards the traders and businessmen in their bid for self-reliance. AASU not only (publicly) sought but actually received generous assistance from the business community, particularly from its Assamese sections. The *Sadai-Guwahati Byabasayee Sanstha* (that also took part in the November *satyagraha* of 1979) came forward with schemes enabling the students to achieve economic self-sufficiency. For instance, trolleys were given free of charge to many Assamese youngmen to sell fruits and vegetables and to make money to earn their livelihood. Perhaps, by December of 1983 the honeymoon with the business community came to a grinding halt and the students resorted to forced extortions from them. Otherwise, AASU's relationship with the business community, particularly its Assamese sections, had been collateral by nature.

By contrast, ULFA's hostility towards the business community is much too publicized and sends shudders along the spine. This also is believed to have led to a panicked flight of capital from the state. But there is nothing at our disposal that warrants such a conclusion. They are opposed not to business activities *per se* but to such business

activities that result in the impoverishment of the region. As a member of its central propaganda cell points out :

"A socialist system should not be one in which personal competence and skills will not be counted. We should hold private projects and entrepreneurship in high esteem. But there should not be any kind of exploitation." (*ULFA-sange...*, 1991 : 78).

How the requirements of a socialist system and private entrepreneurship can be reconciled is too theoretical a question to be settled here. But the point at issue is : ULFA is not ideologically opposed to private business operations. ULFA's attitude towards the Assamese section of business community is more or less sympathetic. They divide them into two. One section of them will certainly play 'second fiddle' to Indian big bourgeoisie. But they are nevertheless a small section. ULFA does not identify the 'Assamese' businessmen as their enemy. On the contrary, they make efforts to forge a united front with them against the Indian state and the Indian big bourgeoisie. Their enmity is with some individual Assamese businessmen rather than their class as such.

#### NOTES

1. Cf. (Skocpol, 1985 : 21).
2. See, Amalendu Guha (Guha, 1980 : 1703).
3. The Nepalis, for instance, have a sprawling business in the city of Guwahati with more than Rs. 6 crores annual turnover.
4. Sharma, Monorama (1990, p. 149). This viewpoint has also been advanced by such scholars as Apurba Baruah (Baruah 1981 : 3-6. Also, 1988 : 322-8) and Udayan Misra (Misra, 1988 : 63-4).
5. Cf. When the persistent hearing problems of those leaders were corrected by the shock treatment of violence, they discovered that accommodation helped to induct new groups with democratic schooling into the competition (Das Gupta, 1989 : 78).
6. Cf. The pre-election mass rallies were evidence enough of the fact that the masses had voted with their feet, as it were, for a party (AGP) that was yet to be born (Dutta, 1988 : 43).
7. Interview with Professor Hiren Gohain on 13 May 1989 at his Guwahati residence.
8. Based on Interviews (*Prasanga...*, 1990) and a feature (Pathak, 1990).

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## BOOK REVIEW

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MAN, MISSION AND MEANS, Calcutta : Minerva Associates, 1989,  
Rs. 120/-**

There has been, of late, a tiresome proliferation of threadbare and slapdash Bose studies. The trouble with this new crop of works is that they are too much enamoured of their subject-matter—the leader or the rebel leader—and are seldom given to a dispassionate study of his socio-political ideas. Indeed it should be noted that the socio-political ideas of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose were mostly responses to the demands of the changing socio-political landscape of the country during its colonial phase. Far too many works on Bose, coming out lately, are mostly confined to some 'kind assessment' of Bose as a political leader, and not so much as a man. These studies hardly shed any light on Bose as a thinker; rather the master-organiser, the charismatic leader and the INA supreme commander engage almost the largest share of their attention. Some of our self-styled, so-called Bose experts are unhappily extravagant in their adoration of Bose, without caring to undertake a hard objective analysis of the activities and ideas of Bose—the great nationalist leader and anti-imperialist freedom-fighter of India. The book under review happens to be however in the nature of a fresh departure from the usual Bose studies in that it promises to be a serious and systematic academic study of his ideas and his ideals. The man, the mission and the means, that is Bose, have been meaningfully related to one other in this research by Dr. Chattopadhyay.

Readers of the book will find profit and pleasure while perusing parts of the relevant introduction to it. In this rather valuable preface the author tries to establish the credentials of Bose as a socio-political thinker of some stature, conceding however that Bose was no system-builder. The author takes great pains to trace the formative intellectual influences in the evolution of his socio-political ideas, and claims, perhaps rightly, that Bose was basically a realist, initiated in a philosophy of action, and also that Bose was engaged in mobilizing contemporary public opinion on the important socio-political problems



that plagued the country. There is yet another reason why the introduction is eminently readable. This is because the author offers his readers an evolution of the course of the freedom movement in India, significantly relating it to the evolution of Bose's socio-political ideas. The author explains why it was not given to Bose, the kind of ceaselessly active political leader as he was, to develop his ideas into something of a system. Time and other constraints always stood in his way. Moreover, philosophising was not quite Bose's cup of tea.

It is gratifying that Dr. Chattopadhyay, while offering a political pen-picture of Bose, has not chosen to rely on mere *cliche* and bye words or sheer clap-trap. He has endeavoured to point out that given the psychological make-up and sociological background as well as the immediate socio-political backdrop of the then colonial India, Bose could not but adopt the means he did to achieve India's independence. Bose was really a missionary in the broadest sense of the term—a thoroughly dedicated and self-effacing soul. The author deserves our compliment in that he has not lost sight of the international perspective of the thoughts and actions of this front-ranking political leader of pre-independence India. Also he has dwelt wisely on Bose's concept of a post-independence Indian polity. As a matter of fact, the burning problems Bose as a nationalist leader addressed himself to in colonial India, such as, planning, education, untouchability, communalism, land reforms are still with us today.

It is evident from the largely dependable bibliography that the book is the end-product of a good deal of painstaking research. The author has been able to do reasonable justice to the rather challenging theme he has chosen.

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ASHOKE MUSTAFI

**Prasanta Ray, CONFLICT AND STATE : EXPLORATION IN THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE POST-COLONIAL STATE IN INDIA, Calcutta : Sarat Book House, 1991 ; Rs. 150/-.**

During the past one and a half decades a good quantity of research output has been published on both international and domestic political conflicts. These works have widened our knowledge about the actors

in conflict, the issues involved, dimensions of conflict, management of conflict, in addition to throwing new light on state-society relations. The book under review falls in this stream of research.

The author has selected a particular type of conflict, which he labels as "vertical political conflict", for examination. Such a conflict, according to the author, is directed towards the state: "In vertical political conflicts, then, what is conflictually challenged is the purpose and the form of use of state power" (p. 1). The study focuses upon such vertical political conflicts and the state's response to them. The state, when faced with such conflicts, has three possible choices for conflict management: conflict regulation, conflict repression, and conflict resolution. If states cannot eliminate conflicts, "every state needs to manage conflict."

Although the basic conflicts management choices are common to all states and not peculiar to the "post-colonial state," and that is why the author finds it difficult to use "post-colonial" as an analytic category, yet he finds some peculiarities of the post-colonial state: (i) through various ways the post-colonial state becomes "the central factor in conflict process"; (ii) for such a state, the conflict management process is internationalized; (iii) "consensus producing political socializing processes" are relatively weak in such states.

In order to examine the nature of conflicts and state's response to them, the author has chosen to examine, first, the conflicts between the state, on the one hand, and, on the other, a cross-section of people who have in common "a sense of being marginal in respect of income, power, social security and future life chances." Secondly, he examines more specifically the conflicts between the state and its 'class III' and 'class IV' employees, or "the subordinates." Thirdly, the author has felt it necessary "to know the level of sufferance as a psychosomatic process" and therefore, has been led to explore the "experience of coercion/repression," and the agonies the state creates through punitive sanctions in course of conflict management. While the first two chapters use predominantly quantitative data, the third chapter uses qualitative data, the "spontaneous period literature."

In the first place, the author has been engaged in an effort at "heuristic decomposition of conflict in order to focus on the details of process of conflict." Such decomposition has been effected through

examining conflict in terms of its "extensity" and "moderation-extremity." The other issue of concern is the state's response to conflict. Such response can take the form of normative repression, financial sanction or stimulating adverse public reaction against the "contenders." Which particular response would be selected at one or subsequent stages of a conflict, or in different conflicts would depend upon "the information on efficacy of a particular technique or a combination of techniques," for after all, "even the state is a learning system." However, on the basis of his empirical evidence, the author finds repression, especially normative repression of conflict, as the most preferred form of conflict management in the post-colonial Indian state. But when the state was willing to choose a "more positive conflict resolution exercise," its impact on conflicts was also significantly positive.

Secondly, the author focuses upon the post-colonial state in India, on the one hand, and the unionized employees in class III and class IV of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs, on the other, as antagonists. In this context the "class I and II officers represent the state as they implement the sub-legal rules of the state administration, drawing on the authority of the state". Strikes are taken by the author as the principal indicator of conflict, but other expressions of conflict like "potential strikes" and minor conflicts at local, regional and national levels are also taken into account. The analysis has cited a number of illustrations of conflictual collective actions as well as a corresponding series of responses by the state. The findings largely confirm what many other related studies have already pointed out: for instance, that union loyalty of the employees does not necessarily coincide with political loyalty as expressed in elections; that politicization of unions increases their multiplicity; that unions are primarily concerned with bread and butter issues; and that the state has largely been successful in handling these conflicts in ways other than through significant redistribution of income.

The shorter chapter titled "Sobs and Shrieks" presents a number of literary expressions (mentioning the dates or other publication details of these citations would have been helpful) of "Bengal's Naxalites," for the author considers these as "the best source of qualitative data on the state's coercive/repressive response to conflicts",

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